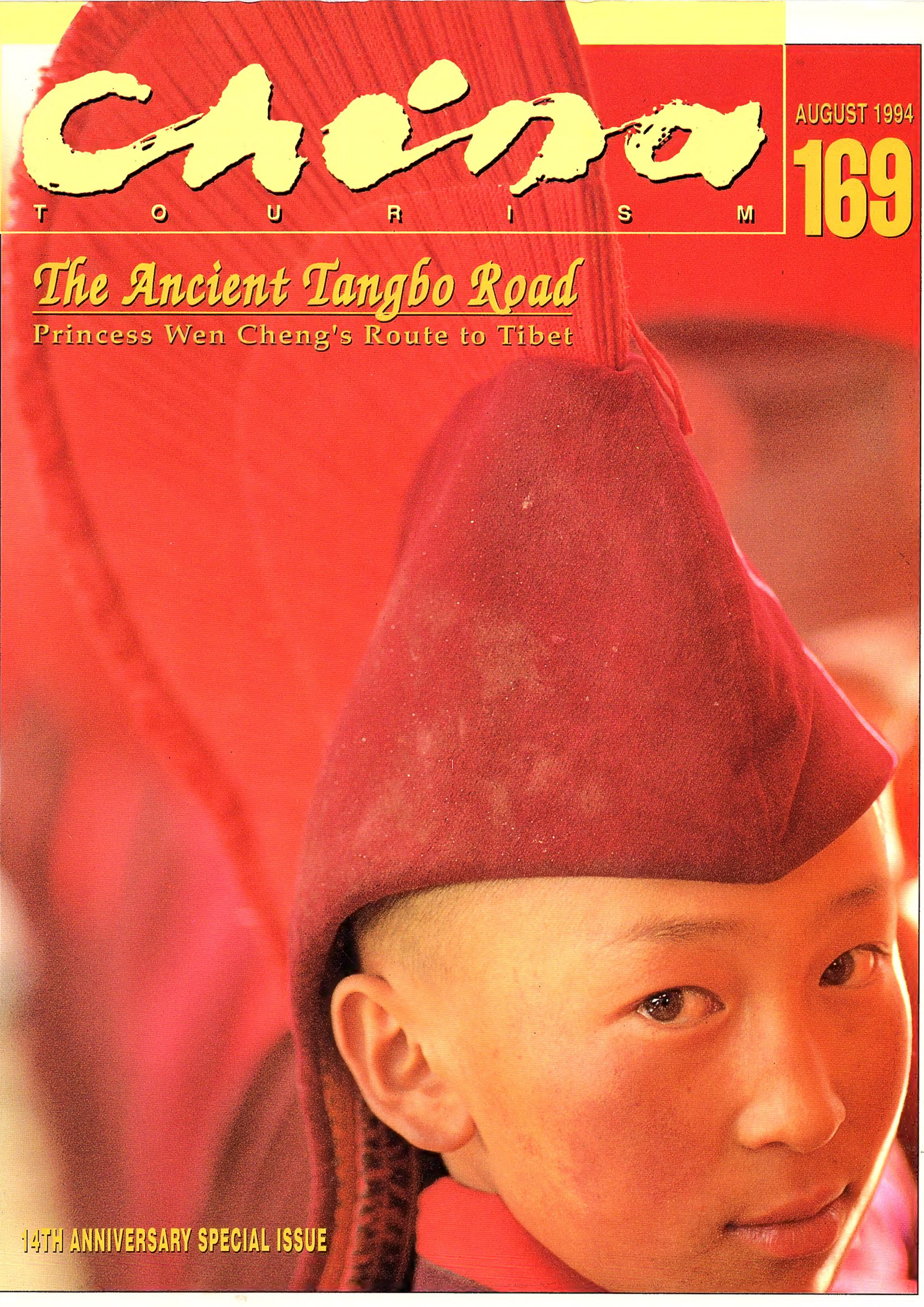
China
TOURISM

AUGUST 1994
169

The Ancient Tangbo Road
Princess Wen Cheng's Route to Tibet



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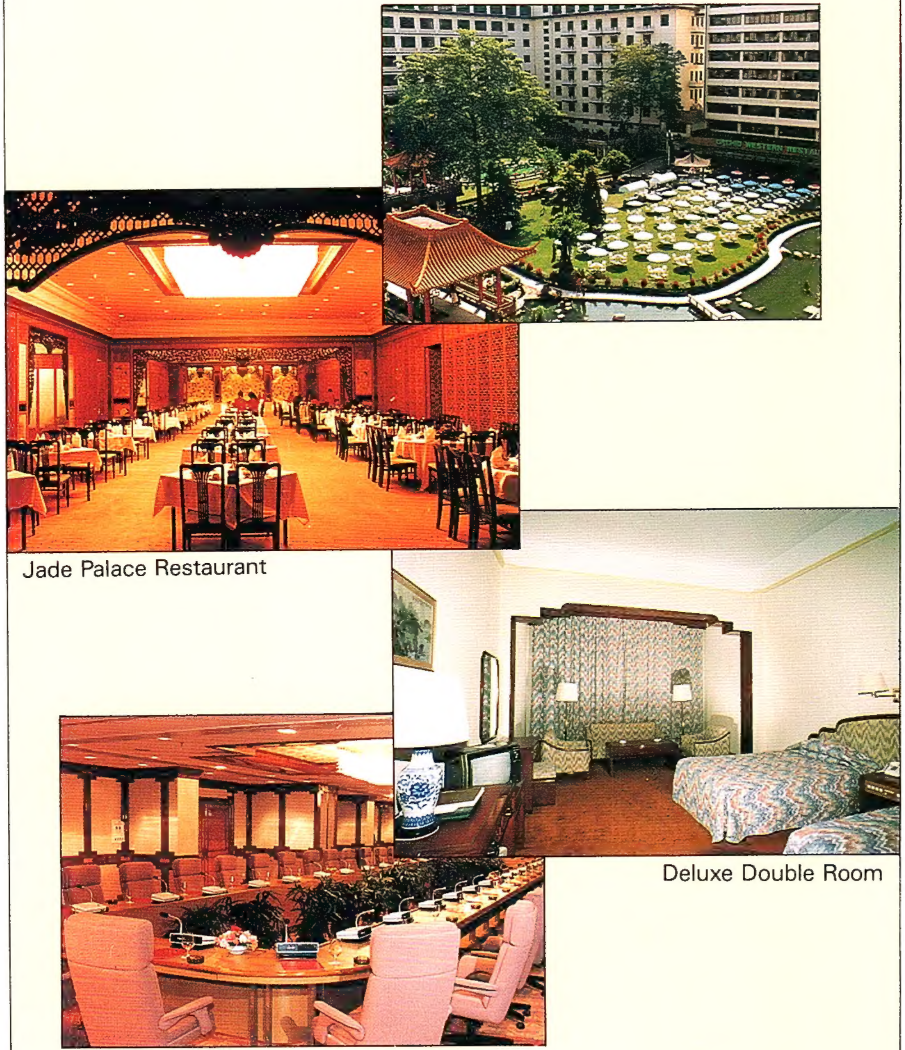

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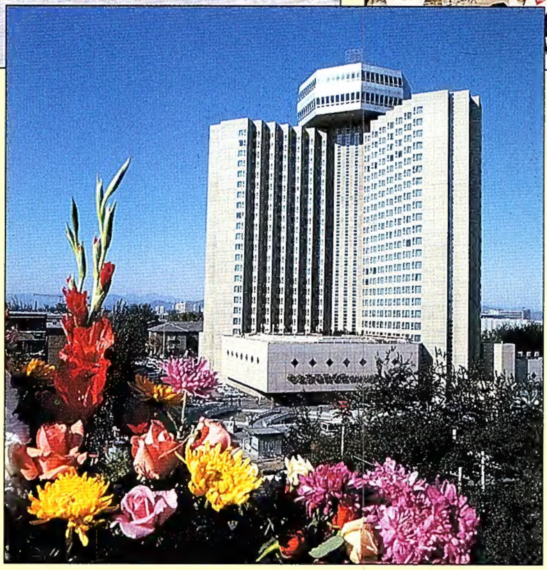

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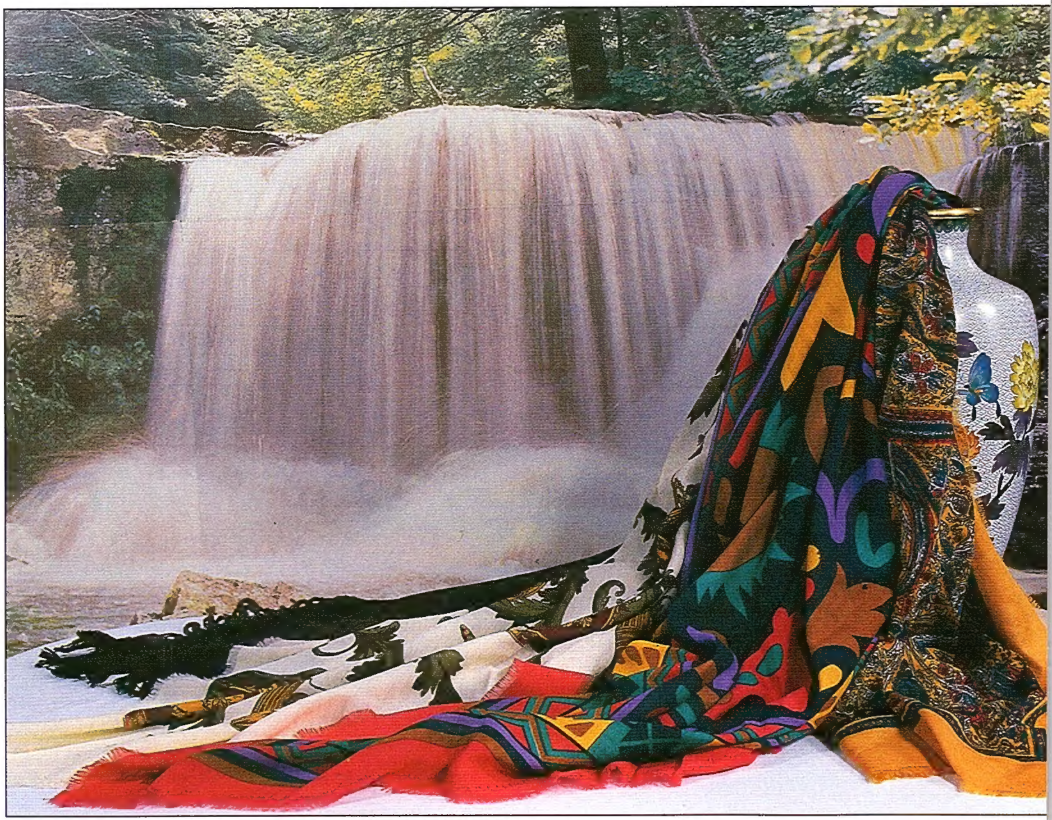

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The Ancient Tangb

Songtsan Gambo and Princess Wen Cheng

Road: Princess Wen Cheng's Route to Tibet

PHOTOS BY ZHENG YUNFENG • ARTICLE BY BAI YU

This mural shows Princess Wen Cheng entering Tibet.

It is probably difficult to find in either Chinese or world history a route like the Tangbo Road – so full of dangers and hardships, and yet with varying scenery of great charm. The road stretches across snowy pastures at 4,500 metres above sea level and then passes through a 700-kilometre no-man's land, and is also marked with the footprints of two Tang-dynasty princesses.

The Tangbo Road was begun and reached its height during the Tang Dynasty (618-907). Along the 3,000-kilometre road – which ran from the Tang-dynasty capital of Chang'an (present-day Xi'an) to Lhasa, then capital of the Tubo Kingdom – horses carrying imperial envoys, merchants, monks and priests shuttled continuously between the courier posts that dotted the route. This road to the "roof of the world" not only made communications possible between the Tang Empire and the Tubo Kingdom, but also connected up with the road leading to Nepal's capital of Kathmandu, and further to India and other South Asian countries.

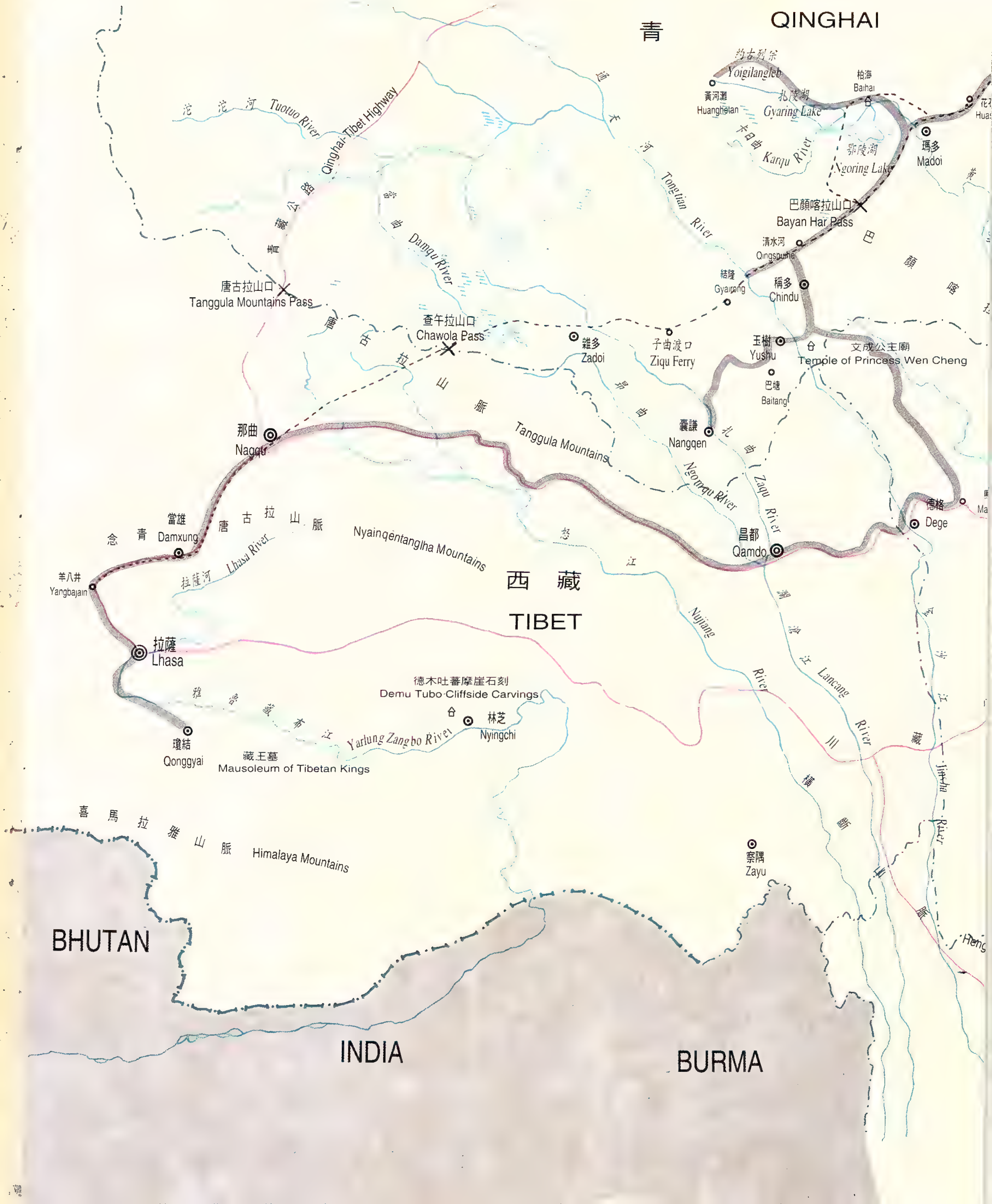
In 641 during the Tang Dynasty, Princess Wen Cheng was sent as a bride to Tubo, a land far away from the Tang capital. The princess and her entourage were from the Central Plains, and were the first group of people to travel this route from Chang'an to Lhasa. Afterwards, travellers and caravans began following the same route all year round, paving the way for friendship to develop between the Tang and Tubo empires.

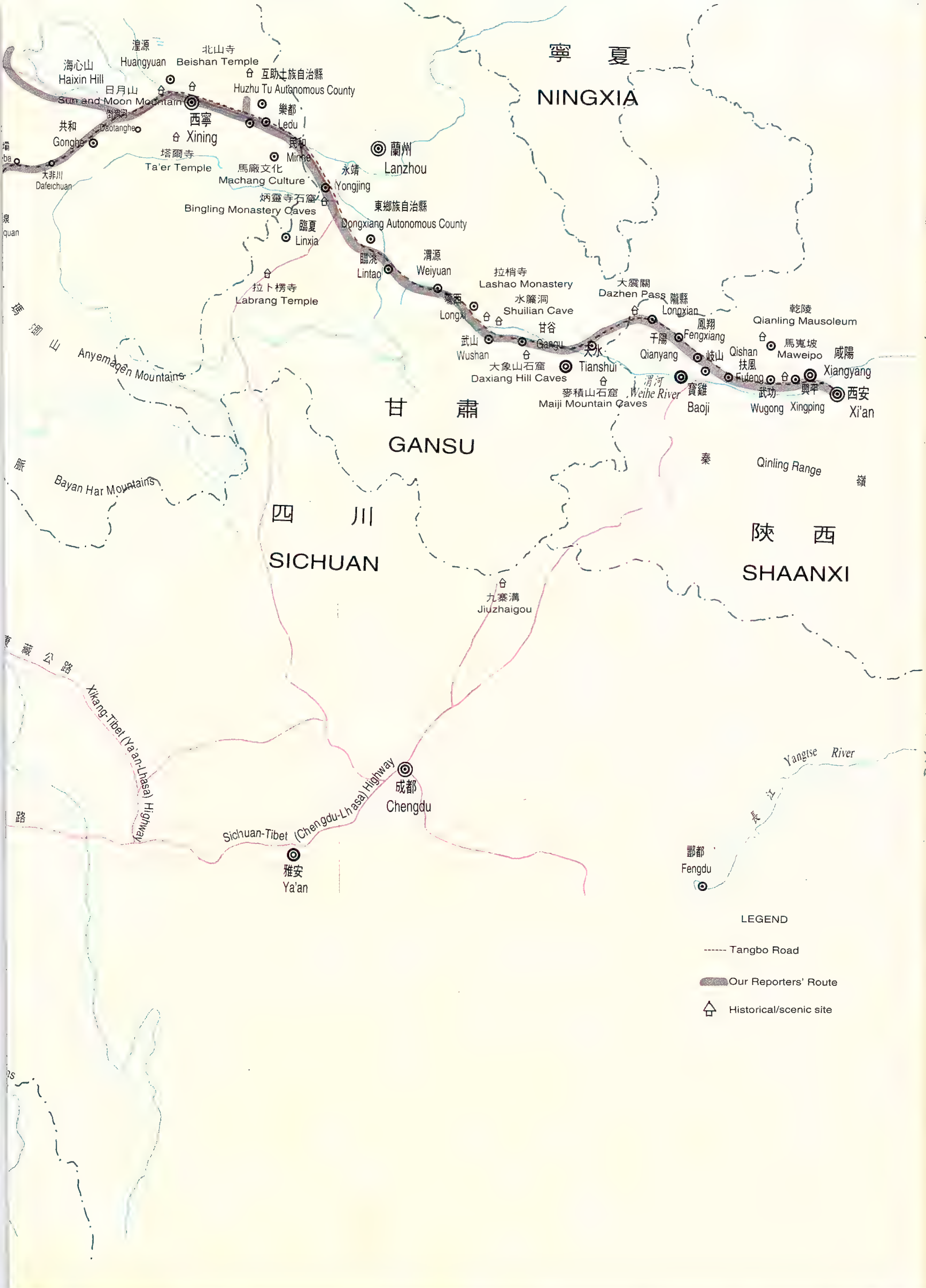
More than 1,300 years later, we made a three-year survey of the ancient road, roughly following in Princess Wen Cheng's footsteps. Along the way, we crossed over many mountains and rivers: Longshan Mountain, Riyue (Sun and Moon) Mountain, the mountain ranges of Bayan Har, Tanggula, Nyainqêntanglha; the Weihe, Taohe, Huangshui and Yellow rivers, as well as the area where the source of the Yangtse, Yellow, Lancang and Nujiang rivers are located. We also visited two beautiful lakes in Qinghai, the Gyaring and Ngoring, and witnessed the customs and life styles of the local Hui, Dongxiang, Salar, Tu, Tibetan and Han people and some of their festive activities.

The section of the road from Xining, the capital of Qinghai, to Lhasa is one of great perils and desolation, but the brave traveller is rewarded with spectacular scenery all along the way. Even now, the night we visited a Tu village and saw them celebrate their unique Flower Festival is still fresh in our minds. The simplicity and honesty of the Tibetans living in the remote Heyuan area, where the Yellow River has its source, were also unforgettable. Equally memorable were the precipitous Qinghai-Tibet Highway, the Tibetan women horse-riders, the interesting sight of youngsters riding on sheep and the intrepid yaks on the Qiangtang Plateau, who vigorously defended flocks of sheep from attacks by vicious wolves in the middle of the night.

Today, what with air and road travel so convenient between Tibet and other places in China, the ancient road has long since vanished. Still, it has left to later generations an ancient civilizations' historical relics, enchanting landscapes, mysterious wildernesses, desolate mountains and snowy pastures – all of which are attracting more and more tourists.

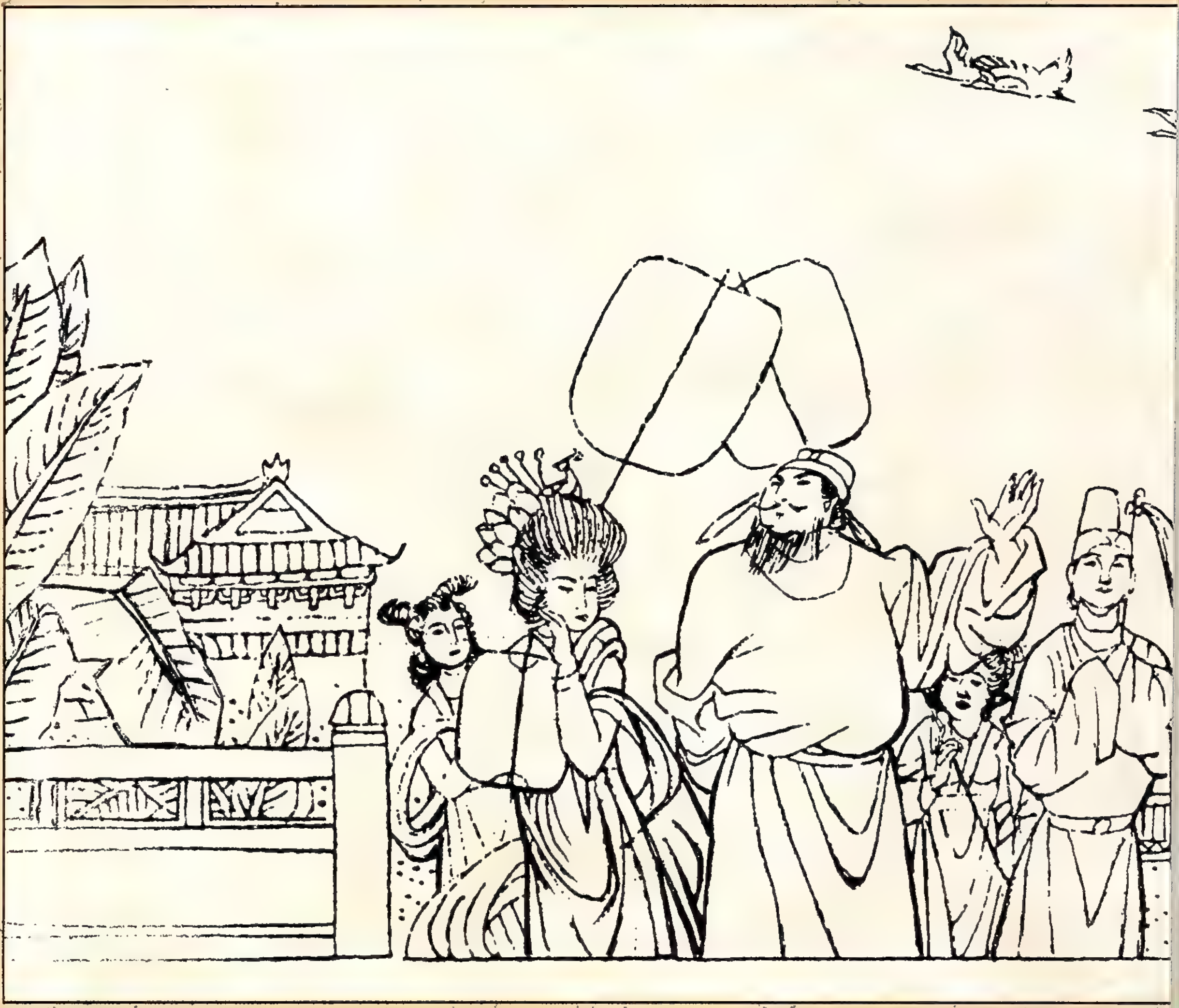
Our Reporters' Route Along the Tangbo Road




湟源
Huangyuan
北山寺
Beishan Temple
海心山
Haixin Hill
日月山
Sun and Moon Mountain
倒淌河
Daotanghe
互助土族自治縣
Huzhu Tu Autonomous County
樂都
Ledu
西寧
Xining
共和
Gonghe
塔爾寺
Ta'er Temple
大非川
Dafeichuan
民和
Minhe
馬廠文化
Machang Culture
永靖
Yongjing
蘭州
Lanzhou
寧 夏
NINGXIA
炳靈寺石窟
Bingling Monastery Caves
臨夏
Linxia
東鄉族自治縣
Dongxiang Autonomous County
臨洮
Lintao
渭源
Weiyuan
拉卜楞寺
Labrang Temple
拉梢寺
Lashao Monastery
隴西
Longxi
水簾洞
Shuilian Cave
大震關
Dazhen Pass
隴縣
Longxian
乾陵
Qianling Mausoleum
鳳翔
Fengxiang
千陽
Qianyang
岐山
Qishan
馬嵬坡
Maweipo
咸陽
Xiangyang
扶風
Fufeng
武功
Wugong
興平
Xingping
西安
Xi'an
武山
Wushan
甘谷
Gangu
天水
Tianshui
大象山石窟
Daxiang Hill Caves
麥積山石窟
Maiji Mountain Caves
渭河
Weihe River
寶雞
Baoji
瑪 沁 山
Anyemaqên Mountains
甘 肅
GANSU
秦
Qinling Range
嶺
脈
Bayan Har Mountains
四 川
SICHUAN
陝 西
SHAANXI
九寨溝
Jiuzhaigou
康 藏 公 路
Xikang-Tibet (Ya'an-Lhasa) Highway
路
Sichuan-Tibet (Chengdu-Lhasa) Highway
成都
Chengdu
雅安
Ya'an
Yangtse River
長 江
酆都
Fengdu
LEGEND
------ Tangbo Road
Our Reporters' Route
Historical/scenic site

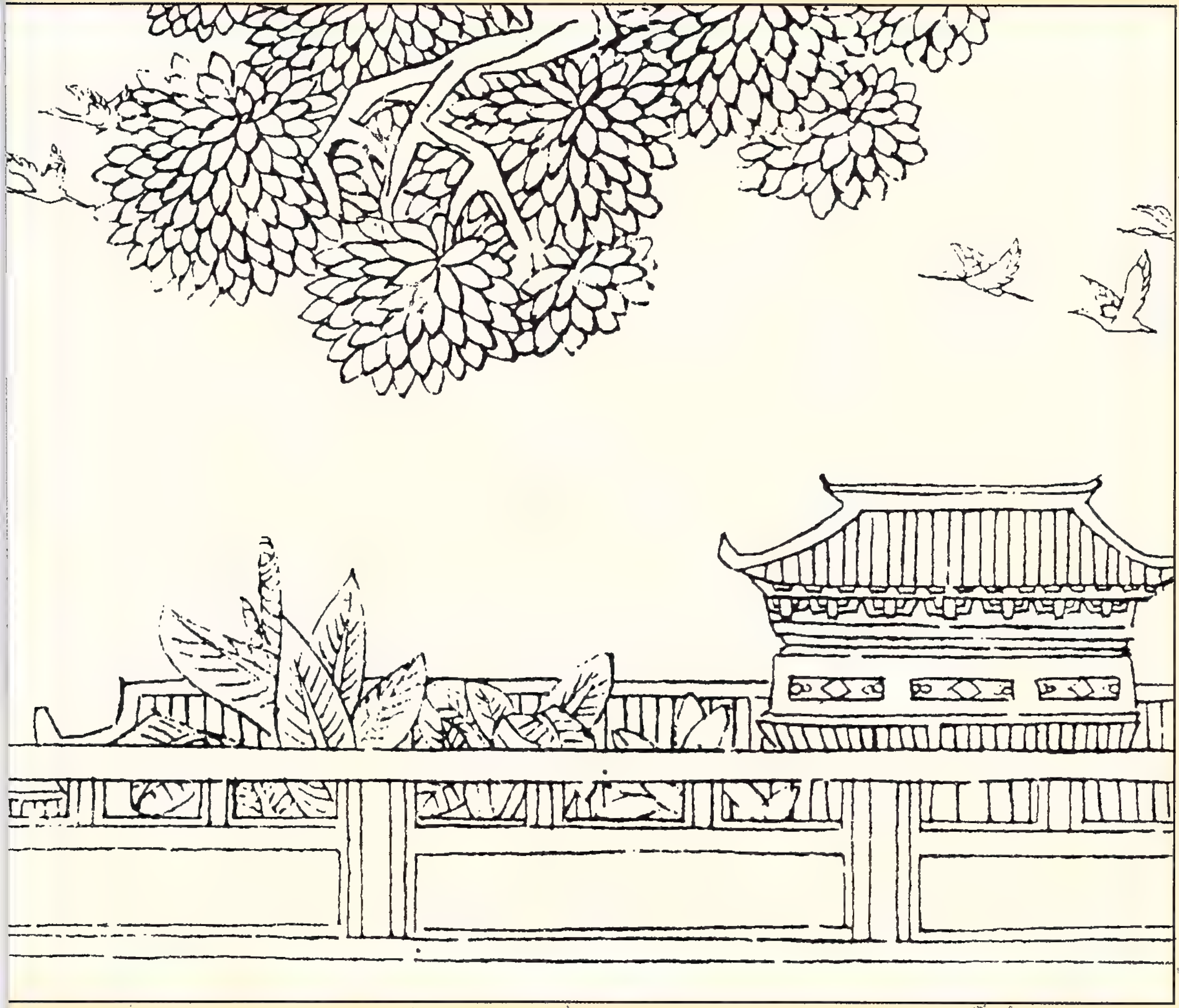
CHAPTER ONE

Xi'an – A City with a Tang



Emperor Taizong of the Tang Dynasty finally consented to marry Princess Wen Cheng to Songtsan Gambo. He also gave many excellent craftsmen and tools, which were unavailable in ancient Tibet, as dowry for the princess to bring to her new home.

Dynasty Atmosphere



Althoug many people know that the city of Xi'an in Shaanxi Province was once the capital of China, few realize that in that same area – the Guanzhong Plain – over 12 ancient dynasties based their capitals. Xi'an is perhaps the most well-known because it was the capital of the great Tang Dynasty (618-907), one of the most prosperous and culturally advanced periods in Chinese history.

To begin tracing the ancient route that linked the Tang Empire with ancient Tibet, our first stop was naturally Xi'an. What impressed me most during our short stay in Xi'an was that we could feel , a kind of ancient atmosphere there, especially that of the Tang era. Wherever we went, we saw Tang structures, Tang ruins, Tang mausoleums, Tang relics and performances of Tang-dynasty songs and dances.

It was from here that the Tang-dynasty Princess Wen Cheng and, later, Princess Jin Cheng, set off for ancient Tibet to get married. Both of them followed the same route, first heading west, crossing Xianyang Bridge and travelling along the northern bank of the Weihe River, passing the postal stations at Maweipo and Wugong, and then the vast expanse of Zhouyuan (present-day Qishan County) to Fengxiang. They then had to ascend Longshan Mountain on the border between Shaanxi and Gansu, cross Dazhen Pass and travel west for altogether 3,000 kilometres to reach Tibet. More than a thousand years have passed since then, but the west winds still sweep across this ancient route and the Guanzhong Plan.

1

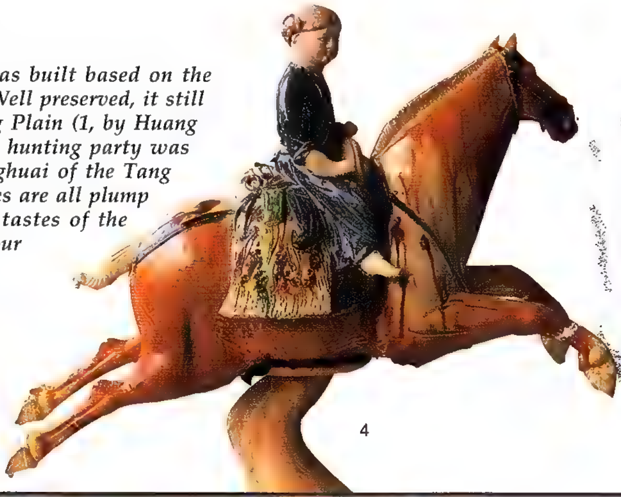
As early as the Han Dynasty (206 B.C.-A.D. 220) the famous Silk Road linked up Xi'an with Central Asia and Europe. Another important route, however, was opened up during the Tang Dynasty (618-907), and that was the route from Xi'an to ancient Tibet, then called the Tubo Kingdom. The latter route, still unknown to many people even today, was the one we followed.

This route may never have been opened up at all had it not been for the Tang emperor's decision to marry Princess Wen Cheng to the King of Tubo. It all started in the early seventh century. After the fall of the Sui Dynasty, civil wars continued to rage in China for several years. Finally, a man named Li Yuan and his son emerged as the victors and founded the Great Tang Empire, choosing Chang'an (Xi'an) as their capital. When his son, Li Shimin, assumed the throne, he made expeditions to border areas, starting in the western regions. Despite several expeditions to the west, however, he failed to make any further military gains.

During the same period, a Tibetan called Songtsan Gambo conquered several small kingdoms on the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau and established a unified kingdom which he named Tubo. Being a wise ruler, he knew the importance of having a peaceful, stable political situation, thus he decided that to achieve this goal, he needed to have good relations with the newly-founded Tang Empire. So he sent a man who was particularly erudite to the Tang Empire as his envoy, who then proposed several times to the Tang emperor that the Tibetan king be allowed to marry a Tang princess. He finally succeeded in getting Emperor Li Shimin's consent to allow Princess Wen Cheng to be Songtsan Gambo's wife. During the 200 peaceful years that followed, emissaries and merchants travelled repeatedly between Chang'an and Lhasa, resulting in the creation of this 3,000-kilometre-long route.

3

Xi'an's Ming-dynasty city wall was built based on the wall of the Tang imperial palace. Well preserved, it still lies in the centre of the Guanzhong Plain (1, by Huang Jixian). ■ This mural portraying a hunting party was found in the grave of Prince Zhanghuai of the Tang Dynasty (2). ■ Tang-dynasty figures are all plump and round, showing the aesthetic tastes of the time (3). ■ This type of Tang tri-colour glazed sculpture was very popular during Princess Wen Cheng's day (4).



4

1

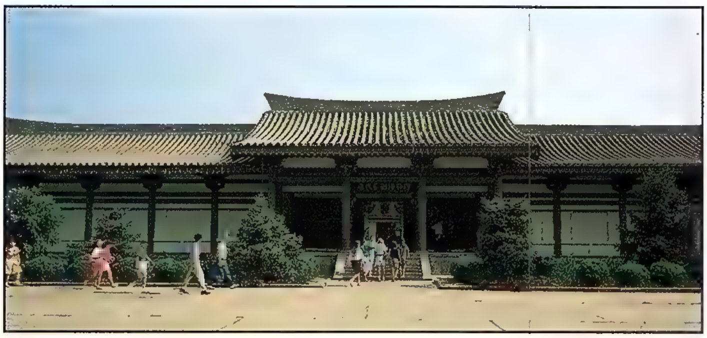
Historical Relics Everywhere in Xi'an

Some 1,300 years after the famous marriage between Princess Wen Cheng and Songtsan Gambo, we arrived in Xi'an to begin tracing her journey. As we exited the railway station, we immediately saw the famous city wall of Xi'an. Tall, intact and solid, this ancient wall separates the old town and the new area of Xi'an. There were over 20 entrances along the four sides of the city wall, and on each side there was a main entrance which had a high rostrum on the top and a large gateway. Today, these gates are still open for vehicles, bicycles and people to enter and leave the city, just as in the old days.

I had thought that the city wall standing today was built during the Tang Dynasty, but that is not so. It was not until I saw a stone tablet standing at the foot of the city wall that I realized the wall had been rebuilt during the much later Ming Dynasty, based on the walls of a Tang Dynasty imperial palace.

We left by the northern entrance, drove north for a kilometre or so and came to an earthen mound known as the Dragon Head Mound, which ran from east to west. The east end was higher but barren, without any pine trees or pavilions. This was once the site of Daming Palace, which was built by Li Shimin for his father Li Yuan as a summer resort. Before the palace was completed, however, Li Yuan died. It was later enlarged and became the emperor's living quarters, as well as the hall where he discharged his official duties. We climbed to the ruins of Hanyuan Hall, the front building of the palace, where we had a good view of the area. Below we could see the closely packed roofs of houses and the setting sun leaving its glow over the ancient city.

5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In the southern suburbs, slightly to the east of Xi'an, is the Great Wild Goose Pagoda built by Emperor Taizong (r. 627-649) in honour of the monk Xuan Zang, who had returned from his mission of bringing back Buddhist sutras from India. To the east of the pagoda sits a Tang-style structure called the Museum of Tang-dynasty Art. There are six exhibition halls here, each on a different aspect of life in the Tang Dynasty: "Chang'an – the Tang Capital", "Tang Customs", "Tang Poetry and Books", "Carvings and Paintings" and "Arts and Crafts of Chang'an". The ancient capital is thus well presented to the public of today. The sixth hall, called "The Best of the Treasure Trove", was specially set up for the purpose of promoting cultural exchanges with foreign countries. Academic lectures are delivered and temporary art exhibitions are often held in this hall.

4

In the resplendent hall of Tang Customs, there are all sorts of Tang-dynasty objects such as Tang music scores for dances, furniture, daily necessi-

Dresses worn by both noble and common people, and women's hair fashions, are on display in the Museum of Tang-dynasty Art (1). ■ *The magnificent Daming Palace stood on this stretch of loess land over 1,000 years ago (2, by Shi Bao Xiu).* ■ *The buildings in the Museum of Tang-dynasty Art are all modelled after the architectural style of the Tang Dynasty (3).* ■ *An ancient street lays along the southern gate of Xi'an's city wall (4, by Hu Wugong).* ■ *This picture shows the envoy sent by the king of Tubo to propose marriage to the Tang princess (5).*

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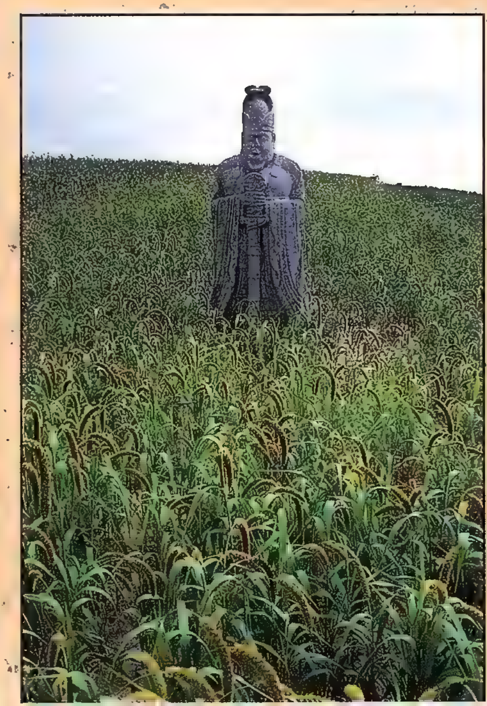

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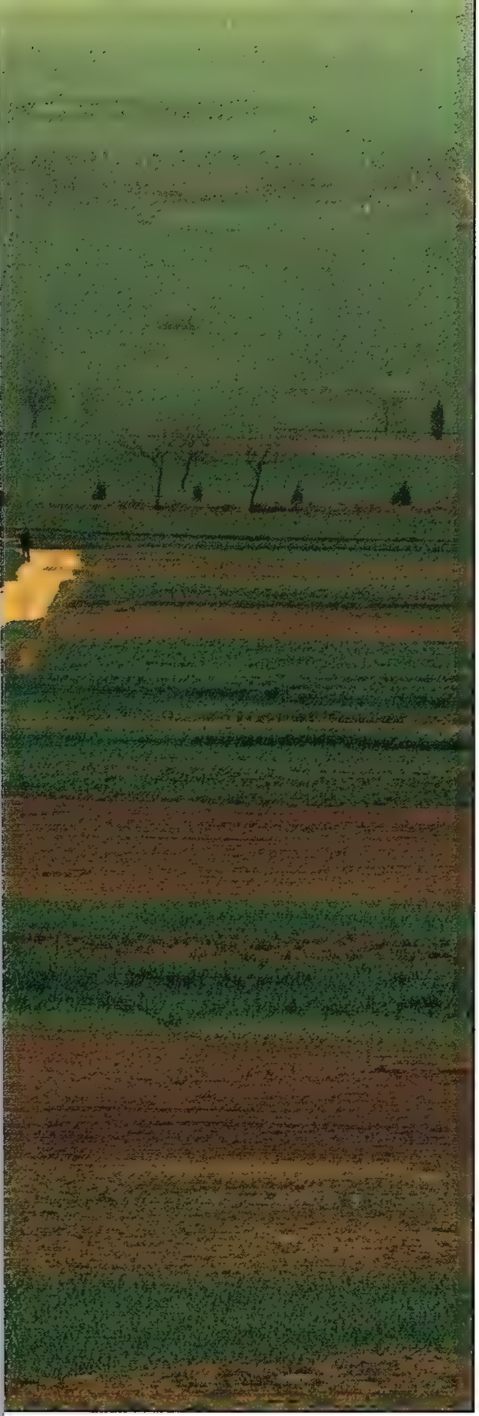


ties, silk products and carvings, creating a vivid display of Tang life. Among all the cultural relics unearthed, the Tang tri-coloured glazed sculpture is the most familiar to people. During the period from the reign of Emperor Gaozong to the reign of Emperor Xuanzong (650-712), this type of sculpture was very popular. The basic colours used are yellow, green and blue, supplemented by white, black, dark green and russet. The female figures are elegant and graceful, with plump bodies and serene features. This style of art reflected both the aesthetics and the affluence of life in the Tang Dynasty.

The imperial mausoleums of the Tang Dynasty are all as great and magnificent as palaces. The burial objects are rich in variety, but perhaps most noteworthy are the murals on the interior walls of the tombs. Here one can see a reproduction of the famous mural found in the grave of Crown Prince Zhanghuai. The mural depicts elaborately-dressed people riding on horses in a forest. Flags are fluttering, and the riders have bows and arrows at their waists, as if they are on their way to a hunt.

Another mural shows a game called "horse ball", where the players shuttle to and fro, competing with one another to scramble for the ball. This sport, introduced from Tibet, was very popular at that time. Still another presents a scene with Tang officials greeting foreign emissaries from Japan and several kingdoms in the west. The clothes worn by the foreigners are all different in style, and their expressions are lively and vivid. The officials who are greeting the visitors look graceful in demeanour, yet their expressions reveal their inner feelings upon seeing the foreign visitors, who are a little bit awkward and clumsy in their attempts at imitating Chinese courtesies.

There was so much to do in Xi'an, but we were unable to see everything. Because of limited time, we had to say good-bye to this ancient city and continue our journey west along the ancient route linking Xi'an and Tibet.

Where the Tangbo Road and Silk Road Overlap

We left Xi'an and headed northwest, crossed the Weihe River, passed through Xianyang and then came to the renowned Maweipo Post – an important postal station during the Tang Dynasty where couriers changed horses and rested. It was also a place where Tang officials met or saw off foreign emissaries. Unfortunately, we could see no sign of the ancient post, but we did see the tomb of Imperial Consort Yang Yuhuan, whose love affair with the emperor has been told in China for centuries.

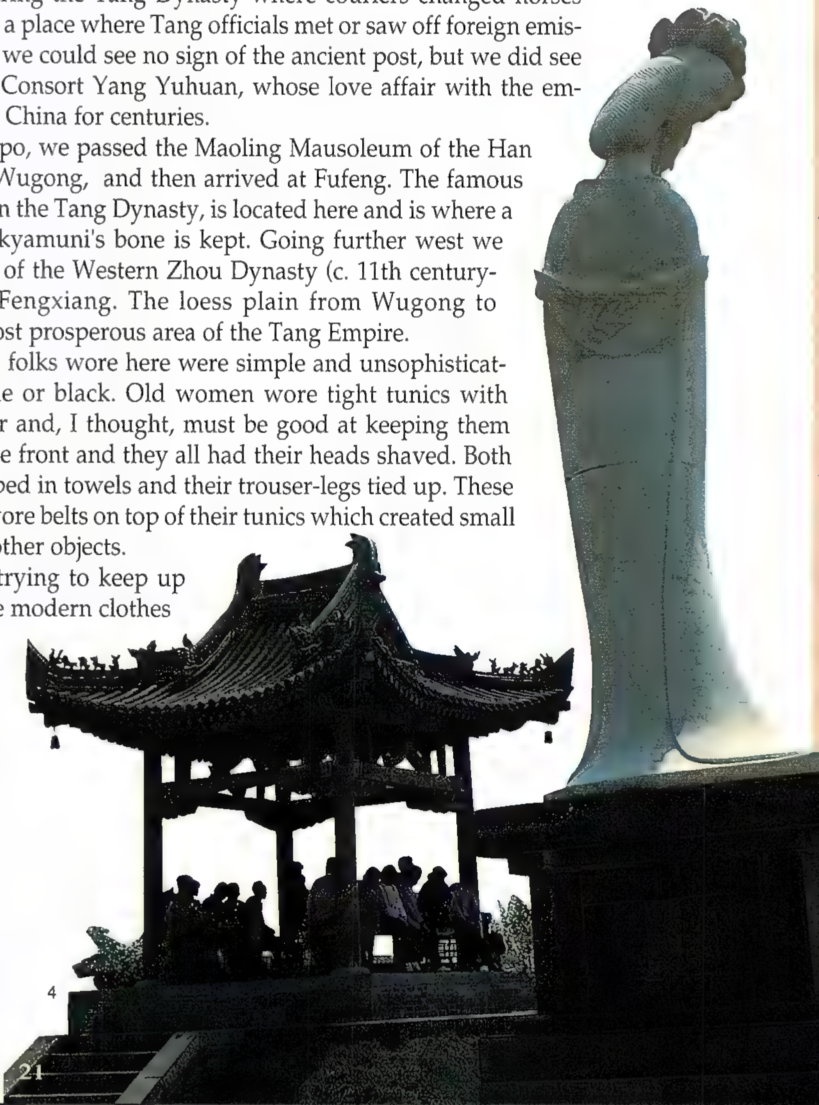
Having left Maweipo, we passed the Maoling Mausoleum of the Han Emperors Wudi and Wugong, and then arrived at Fufeng. The famous Famen Temple, built in the Tang Dynasty, is located here and is where a section of Buddha Sakyamuni's bone is kept. Going further west we passed Qishan, home of the Western Zhou Dynasty (c. 11th century-770 B.C.), and then Fengxiang. The loess plain from Wugong to Fengxiang was the most prosperous area of the Tang Empire.

The clothes the old folks wore here were simple and unsophisticated, most of them blue or black. Old women wore tight tunics with buttons down one side, which looked rather sober and, I thought, must be good at keeping them warm. Old men wore tunics with buttons down the front and they all had their heads shaved. Both the old men and old women had their heads wrapped in towels and their trouser-legs tied up. These were measures to keep out the dust. The men also wore belts on top of their tunics which created small pockets where they could safely keep money and other objects.

The young women, however, were obviously trying to keep up with the times. They had their hair permed and wore modern clothes

Emperors of various dynasties were buried under the fertile loess of the Guanzhong Plain. This photo shows the road leading to the Tang-dynasty Qiaoling Mausoleum (1, by Pan Ke). ■ *This is the ancient ferry at Xianyang. Throughout history, a great many Chang'an people left their home via this ferry and embarked on journeys to the plateaus of the west (2, by Wei Wangxiang).* ■ *Stone statue of a minister stands in front of the Jianling Mausoleum (3, by Pan Ke).* ■ *There is no sign of the official station at Maweipo, where couriers once changed horses or rested, but there is a lonely stone statue of Yang Yuhuan, consort of a Tang emperor, beside her grave (4, by Shi Bao Xiu).*

4



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just like urban women. The young men all wore Western-style suits even when they were driving ox-carts, ploughing fields and hoeing land, proudly keeping the little brand tag showing on the cuff.

In the area of Qishan and Fengxiang, people like making "hundred-patch tunics" for their children to wear. They gather little pieces of cloth from relatives or friends and patch them up into a vest or tunic. They believe that the kids wearing these tunics will receive the blessings from many families and will then have long, peaceful lives. Meticulously made, the tunics are so beautiful that people, especially Western tourists, regard them as works of art.

Dazhen Pass, a Place of Strategic Importance

We continued our journey west and, after Qianyang, reached Longshan Mountain on the border between Shaanxi and Gansu. Back in the Tang Dynasty travellers had to go through a place called Dazhen Pass on Longshan Mountain. Throughout history many battles took place here in order to seize the pass. In 622 during the Tang Dynasty, Tujue (ancient Turkic) troops took Dazhen Pass and threatened to attack Chang'an. Then in the mid-Tang Dynasty, Tibetans seized Dazhen Pass and tried to fight further on, taking advantage of the An Lushan-Shi Siming Rebellion within the Tang Empire.

In the middle of the Tang Dynasty a new pass called Anrong Pass was built some 15 kilometres to the east of Dazhen Pass, which by then was already desolate and in ruins. After driving 15 kilometres northwest, we got to a place called Guguanxiang, near which was a stone tablet carved with the three characters for Anrong Pass. We looked round but could not find any remains of the pass structure. All we could see was a 30-metre-long, four-metre-high earthen mound, which we assumed was the ruins of the pass wall. We were told that stone plinths and tiles had been found in the 1960s when people had come to build a road and install electric lines here.

3

4

About a hundred metres to the south stood a rock with a small hole in which flags used to be planted, evidence of the existence of the former pass. As we went north, the space between the mountains on the either side became narrower. The scenery was wild, with thick trees and bushes. For dozens of kilometres we did not a see single soul, however we did hear one person playing a pipe and occasionally saw sheep and cattle amidst the vegetation. After crossing Shi daoqiao (Number 10 Bridge) we got to the top of a peak. Only a few metres away there was an other peak, on top of which stood a stone tablet carved with the words "The Link of the Qinling Range and Longshan Mountain", which was set up during the early years of the Republic of China. This was all that remained of Dazhen Pass.

As we went down the mountain on the other side, we suddenly caught sight of a plume of smoke rising from among the trees. At the same time, a fragrant smell of cooking food wafted over, and we stopped to find several girls roasting some maize for lunch. They said they were there collecting walnuts, and hospitably offered us some maize. As we accepted and ate heartily, a volley of green walnuts hailed down on our heads. We looked up and saw a girl in red perched on a tree, while brandishing a bamboo pole to beat walnuts off the branches. We volunteered to help pick them up and put them into a basket. To show their gratitude for our small contribution, they offered us some of their fresh walnuts. These mountain girls were very nimble with their fingers: one girl broke open a walnut with a small knife and peeled it so that the nut inside was revealed. I threw it into my mouth and savoured the crispy flavour.

As far as design is concerned, the Flower Lanterns hung during the lunar New Year holidays by villagers inhabiting the Longshan Mountain area are just like the night lanterns which were hung outside an official post during the Tang Dynasty (1, by Jiao Jingquan). ■ *The simple clothes the elderly farmers wear on the Guanzhong Plain have a traditional look (2).* ■ *Having gone through Dazhen Pass one comes to Longshan Mountain, which is covered with thick grass and trees. This area is now a national preserve (3, by Li Shengli).* ■ *Ceremonies for "greeting" and "seeing off" Buddhas and other gods in Fengxiang are still practised today, a holdover from the Tang Dynasty when the Buddha was greatly worshipped (4, by Yang Yankang).*

Buddhist Grottoes Along th

Local officials all came out to greet Princess Wen Cheng when she passed Tianshui, an important town in that area.

Weihe and Taohe Rivers

The next part of our route threaded down Longshan Mountain and returned to meander along the Weihe River. Our first stop was at Tianshui in Gansu Province, an important town during the Tang Dynasty. Both the southern route of the Silk Road – the route Xuan Zang chose to go to India to seek Buddhist sutras – and the ancient route linking Chang'an with Tibet passed through Tainshui. Perhaps the most well-known site here is Maiji Mountain.

Going further upstream along the Weihe River we reached Gangu, known as Fuqiang in the Tang era. There are also some grottoes here on a mountain named Daxiang, which is the location of a large Buddha statue that dates back to 1,000 years ago.

In Wushan County we saw another two Buddhist caves namely, Muti Temple and Shuiliandong, and then went to the Bingling Monastery Caves on the banks of the Yellow River. I learned that Princess Wen Cheng offered money to build a Buddha statue here before she crossed the river. Statues of Buddhist figures made of clay or stone were scattered over the valley, which, local people believe, bring blessings and good luck to them. We also discovered that rafts are widely used for transportation on the turbulent waters of the Yellow River. Fearing no danger, boatmen ferry people across the rvier and transport cargo for long distance trips on rafts made of ox-hide bags.

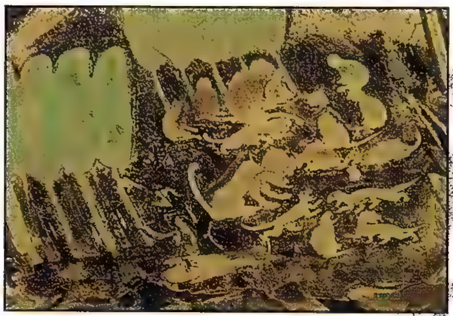
1

From Dazhen Pass, we rode 60 kilometres southwest, passing Qingshui County to Tianshui, an important city in eastern Gansu. Located some 45 kilometres to the southeast of Tianshui, it looks like a pile of wheat, hence the name Maiji (Wheat Pile) Mountain. There are 194 caves arranged in rows on this mountain, which people refer to as an "Oriental Museum of Buddhist Statues". The earliest caves were hollowed out in the late Qin Dynasty, between 384 and 417; other caves were dug in later dynasties. Today, 7,200 stone and clay Buddhist statues and 1,300 square metres of murals have been preserved.

One of the most striking features of Buddhist statues on Maiji Mountain was that they looked so human. The Buddhas were made to look like benevolent elderly men, and the gate guardian (Dvarapala) resembled a simple, rustic mountain dweller. The Goddess of Mercy (Avalokitesvara) had extremely serene features, while the Buddhist lay boys and girls were innocent, their faces wreathed in smiles. There was nothing solemn or mysterious about them – on the contrary they all appeared friendly and warm. I had to admire the skill of the unknown artists who created such life-like and beautiful images.

In Cave No. 43, we saw what was left of the grave of Yi Fo, the wife of Emperor Wendi of the Western Wei Dynasty (535-557). Yi Fo was said to be a beautiful woman who was gentle, quiet, modest and kind-hearted. She was not very keen on jewelry, gorgeous brocades and so on, therefore she was greatly esteemed by both officials and the common people. In order to reduce tensions with the border area to the north, emperor Wendi abandoned the empress, whom he had deeply loved, and married the eldest daughter of the king of Rouran in the north. However, Empress Dao, the new wife of emperor Wudi, was still very jealous of Yi Fo. At her instigation, Rouran troops threatened to attack the Western Wei Kingdom, and therefore the emperor had no choice but to issue an order that Yi Fo kill herself by hanging to appease his new wife. Prince Wudu buried his mother on Maiji Mountain and called the grave the "Solitary Tomb". What Emperor Wendi did greatly angered the people, and the Western Wei Dynasty fell six years after his death.

Having said good-bye to Tianshui, we travelled northwest for another 30 kilometres to reach Gangu. Then we turned south and drove for 12 kilometres to Daxiang Hill, which looks as though someone had cleaved the entire ridge with a huge knife. From the foot of the hill to the top, pavilions and buildings have been constructed at intervals and include Fuxi Hall, Wen Chang Tower, Lingyan Temple, Lu Ban Hall and the Great Buddha Hall at the top. Unfortunately, all the images in the niches had collapsed; the only statue still standing was a 25-metre-high statue of the Buddha. With bared chest and feet, he looked very robust, his cheeks full and his earlobes reaching his shoulders. It is believed that this image was sculpted during the Tang Dynasty. On the ceiling and walls around the statue there were sculptures of flying apsaras, flying dragons and cranes with human faces flying amidst clouds.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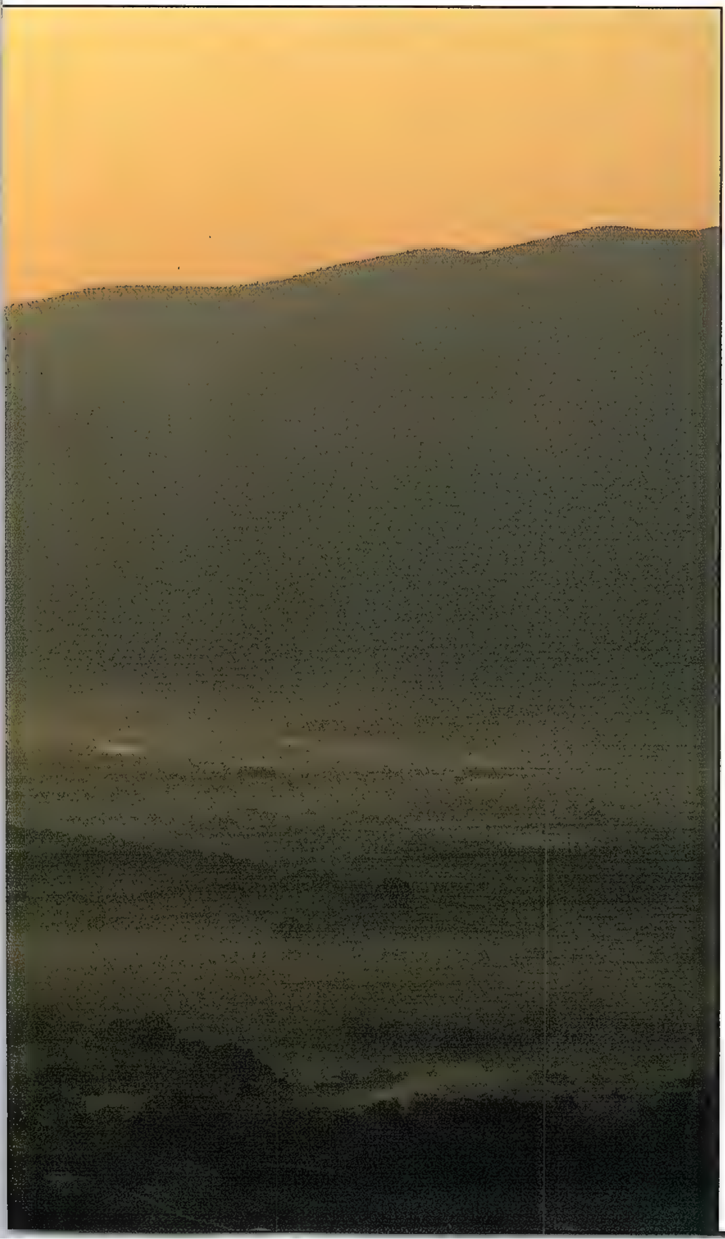

2

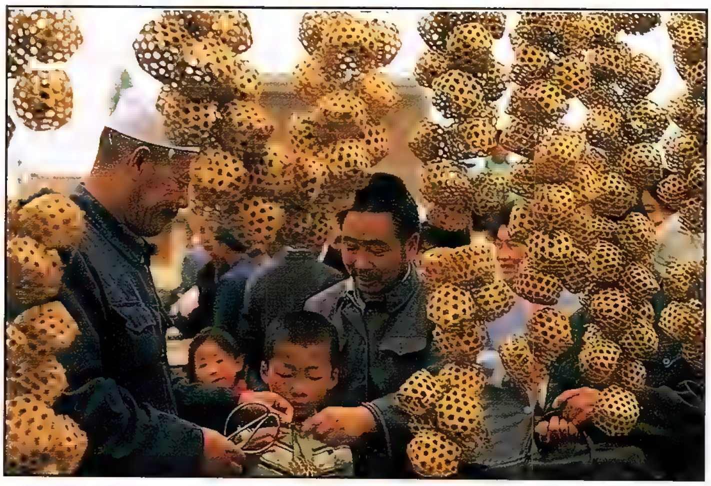
On summer evenings, locals often climb up this hill to enjoy the cool air. We saw some elderly people on their way up, walking with the aid of sticks. Though panting, they climbed on nonstop. Standing on the top of the hill, we had a panoramic view of the Weihe River Valley. A bluish hue began to rise and soon the villages, the ancient town and the railway lines were enveloped in mist.

Having clambered down the hill, we continued our journey west. Fifty kilometres later we arrived at Wushan County, where there are two grottoes called Muti Temple and Shuiliandong. Again there were many stone Buddhist statues carved after the Sui and Tang dynasties, which were quite well-known in the area.

A special product here in Wushan is the *yeguang* cup, although most Chinese people associate these jade carved cups with the city of Jiuquan, also in Gansu. Jiuquan has been known for a century for its production of yeguang cups, but after all those years of quarrying, how much jade could still be left? In

In the Maiji Mountain caves near Tianshui, there are 7,200 clay statues and 1,300 murals, which date back to over 1,500 years ago (1). ■ Tianshui, situated in the Weihe River Valley, sat along the southern route of the Silk Road as well as the Tangbo Road. On his way to India in search of Buddhist scriptures, Xuan Zang, a Tang-dynasty monk, passed Tianshui and travelled along the Weihe River (2). ■ This piece of mural shows various types of wild animals (3). ■ The wall of one grotto at Maiji is covered with neat rows of tiny Buddha images (4).

2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fact, I heard that factories in Jiuquan now had to come here every year to buy jade for the making of their cups.

Apart from yeguang cups, other jade products in Wushan include tea services, decorative figurines of birds and animals, screens and so on. Wushan's opaque jade, chrysolite and white jade are all of high quality, being fine in texture and with a smooth finish.

Sweet Melon All the Way to Lintao

The route from Wushan to Weiyuan via Longxi was also part of both the Tangbo Road and the southern route of the Silk Road. Having crossed Niaoshu Mountain, the ancient route runs west along the Taohe River, another tributary of the Yellow River, and then to the town of Lintao.

I had always thought that Lintao was a wild, desolate place of sand-storms and wind. But to my surprise, all along the 120-kilometre road that ran through the Taohe River Valley, there was no sign of this whatsoever. On the contrary, the smell of sweet melon kept wafting into our bus, along with the late July breeze. Summer is harvest season for melons in this area, thus we would often see piles and piles of white melons, watermelons, peaches, tomatoes and so on. Buses often stopped along the side of the road so that passengers could buy fruit for their journey.

We too stopped for a break to fill up on melons and enjoy the scenery around us. We were surprised to see that the melon fields were covered with cobblestones the size of potatoes. A farmer explained that in this area it rarely rained, therefore it was very dry. To keep water from evaporating, farmers used cobbelstones to cover the fields. In earth moistened in this way, melons grow fast and sweet.

Cobblestones and gravel are an important part of life for people in this area. They need cobblestones to cover fields to grow melons and gravel to bake cakes. The local women set up their stoves in front of their doors and first wash the gravel clean. When it is dry, a little bit of rape oil is dropped in, which is thoroughly stirred in. They then put the gravel and oil into a pan on the stove and roast their cakes over it, which makes them crisp and fragrant. I was told that once these kinds of cakes were presented to the emperor as tribute.

Linxia, a Town of Flowers

Linxia lies at the foot of Taizi Mountain and by the Daxia River, some 60 kilometres away from Lintao. Once the capital of a small kingdom called Baohan, over 10 different nationalities now live here, including Han, Hui, Dongxiang, Bao'an, Tibetan, Tu and Salar peoples. During the Han and Tang dynasties, it was an important trade centre and a place of strategic importance.

Linxia people are fond of horticulture. In the little garden belonging to each household there is always bound to be flowers. From spring to autumn, peonies, evergreen enkianthus, Chinese roses, big-leafed hydrangea, dahlias and other flowers blossom one after the next. Linxia's climate and soil are particularly good for growing dahlias. Cultivated here for generations, they grow sturdy, beautiful and especially large.

The ancient skill of brick carving started in Linxia in the Song Dynasty (960-1279), when bricks carved with all kinds of flowers on one side were used to lay the walls of houses. On our visit to the Linxia Children's Science Palace, we saw a wall carved with a picture of strings of juicy grapes hanging over a trellis. The ropes used to fasten the strings to the trellis looked very real. We saw the same technique used on the walls of the Eight Trigram Pavilion, located in a mosque in Linxia. On the wall at the entrance there was a superb carving of a bottle, a tea service and a lion on a silk ball. The upper part of the mosque's outside wall was also laid with decorative bricks.

Gourd carving is another local skill we greatly admired. Among all the local gourd carvers, Ma Yaotang, also known as the "Master Gourd Carver", is probably the best artist. He has been carving gourds for almost 60 years, and has lost count of how many he has carved. His carvings are mostly of historical events, painted

Brick carvings in Linxia are exquisitely crafted with complicated patterns (1). ■ The Weihe River Valley is flanked by endless loess hills, which look magnificent in summer and autumn (2). ■ Cricket cages at a flower-and-bird market (3). ■ This photo shows Ma Yaotang, an elderly craftsman in Linxia who excels in carving on gourds (4). ■ The Muslim people inhabiting the Taohe River Valley are very fond of horticulture (5).

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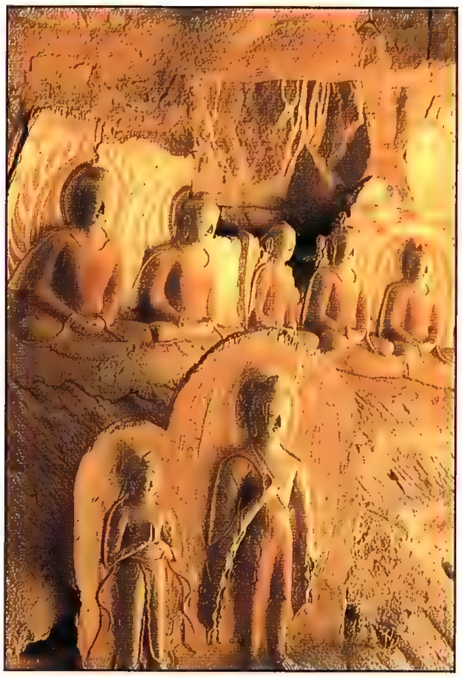

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faces from local opera, Buddhist images, landscapes, flowers and birds. He uses both coloured and black gourds for his carvings.

Having left Linxia, we drove northwest for 50 kilometres and reached Fenglin Pass Ferry on the Yellow River. In the old days the ferry held a strategic location, since to the north was the turbulent Yellow River, to the east Fenglin Pass, and to the west Jishi Mountain. Today, however, there is only a large wooden boat ferrying people and vehicles across the river. From the ferry a 10-minute drive took us to the Liujiaxia Power Station, where we boarded a motorboat bound for the Bingling Monastery Caves.

Our boat passed through a place called Maolong Gorge, then Sigou Gorge and Greater Sigou Gorge. Here we were faced with two stone peaks said to be incarnations of Sakyamuni's mother and aunt, who kept him company during his practices.

The Ancient Bingling Monastery Caves

The Bingling Monastery Caves contain over 180 grottoes hollowed out of a purple cliff face during the Western Qin (385-431), Northern Wei (386-534), Tang, Song, Ming and Qing dynasties. There are altogether 82 stone Buddhist statues and 900 square metres of frescoes. The largest grotto is Cave No. 169. At 27 metres deep, 15 metres high and nine metres wide, it holds seven layers of Buddhist statues. On the northern wall is an inscription carved in the year 420, the first year of the reign of Emperor Jianhong of the Western Qin Dynasty.

This is the earliest grotto inscription ever found in China. The five statues of Sakyamuni on the southern side of the cave represent the five stages he went through on his way to enlightenment. One shows him as no more than a bag of bones, obviously representing his years of severe asceticism.

I was told that Princess Wen Cheng had paid a visit here when she was on her way to Tibet. She had burned incense to show her great respect, and even donated money to have a three-metre-high statue of the Buddha built here. In many caves, we noticed that there were Buddhist images from the Gelugpa (Yellow Hat) Sect as well as murals depicting Tantric practices. These images indicate that Bingling Monastery was an important place for cultural exchanges between the Han Chinese and the Tibetans.

Later on I found that there had been a bridge spanning the Yellow River during the Tang Dynasty, a convenient construction since the river was narrow and the rocky banks high. I guessed that Princess Wen Cheng and her entourage must have crossed that bridge on her way to Tibet.

The mountainous area between Gansu and Qinghai supply timber, wool and other products to various places in China, but since transportation is poor, they must be carried by mules, donkeys and most often rafts. The boatmen are all brave Salar, Hui and Bao'an men, mostly from the area between Xunhua and Hezhou. In spring and autumn, rafts linked together and loaded with timber and wool drift down the Yongjing River and then join up with the Yellow River. The goods are thus transported to Lanzhou in the north and even Baotou in Inner Mongolia.

A large raft is made of 100 ox-hide bags, each of which contains 60 kilograms of wool. The bags are grouped in rows of three and fastened to long parallel poles at the bottom. Then, on top of the bags, other poles are tied vertically so as to securely hold the bags in place. More wool, packed in bales, is placed on the top, thus a raft like this is able to carry 25,000 kilograms of goods. Tents are available on the raft in case it rains. In the evening, the rafts stop along the riverside to moor and boatmen prepare supper and pass the night in the tents.

Every day, these boatmen brave the swift, rushing waters and struggle to avoid dangerous shoals and reefs. Such a hard life has tempered them and made them tough in body and spirit. Just hearing the names of the places they pass – Wolf's Tongue, Boiling Cauldron, Leaping Foxes, Grievous Cliff – one can only imagine the perils they face as they go about their jobs.

Translated by Wang Mingjie

The stone peaks along the Liujiaxia Reservoir look similar to those of Guilin (1). ■ *The grottoes at Bingling Monastery are renowned for their Buddhist carvings. One statue of the Buddha is said to have been carved using funds donated by Princess Wen Cheng (2).* ■ *Gravel is very useful to the people along the Taohe River. They not only use gravel in farming, but also to bake cakes (3, by Hu Wugong).* ■ *Blessed by Buddha, the ancient route along the Weihe and Taohe rivers is full of hope (4, by Jiao Jingquan).*

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CHAPTER THREE

Religion and Culture Arou

Princess Wen Cheng arrived at Shancheng (Xining), a western frontier town during the Tang Dynasty.

d Xining

The next section of our journey took us across the Yellow River on an ox-hide raft, over Mount Laji and then to Longzhi, an ancient garrison town. At Macheng in Minhe County, we saw large piles of ancient pottery shards everywhere, even in the melon fields.

In the Huzhu Tu Autonomous County, we were fortunate to arrive just in time to attend a Flower Festival held by the Tu people. Girls, dressed in their embroidered national costumes, strolled the mountains while singing songs that brought them to the young men they loved. When the moon rose in the sky, pairs of lovers began to disappear into the secluded woods to commence their courtship.

At a Tu wedding, the bridegroom went on horseback at midnight to fetch the bride from her home, where he was "tested" and "harassed" repeatedly by members of the bride's family. After taking the bride to his home, the newlyweds competed to be the first to get into the house, another unique custom of the Tu people.

At Youning Monastery, we watched a religious ceremony that involved a group of "gods" who danced exorcism dances in the drifting snow. Next we went to Xining, which was known as Shancheng in the Tang Dynasty. When Princesses Wen Cheng and Jin Cheng travelled through here on their way to Tibet, they stopped at the town's monastery to pray to Buddha.

Close to the ancient Dahejia Ferry, which was part of both the Southern Silk Road and the ancient Tangbo Road, a bridge was about to be completed. For thousands of years, the only means of crossing the river has been either by wooden junk or ox-hide raft.

The Huangshui River Valley is a fertile oasis (1). ■ *A ferryman propels an ox-hide raft across the Yellow River (2).* ■ *This oddly shaped pottery jar is a fine example of Machang Culture (3).* ■ *The figure on this roof tile from the Qin Dynasty looks like a winged angel (4).* ■ *The big hands of this Buddha statue are said to be able to ward off all problems and disasters in the human world (5).* ■ *Barren trees along the ancient road between the Yellow River and the Huangshui River (6)*

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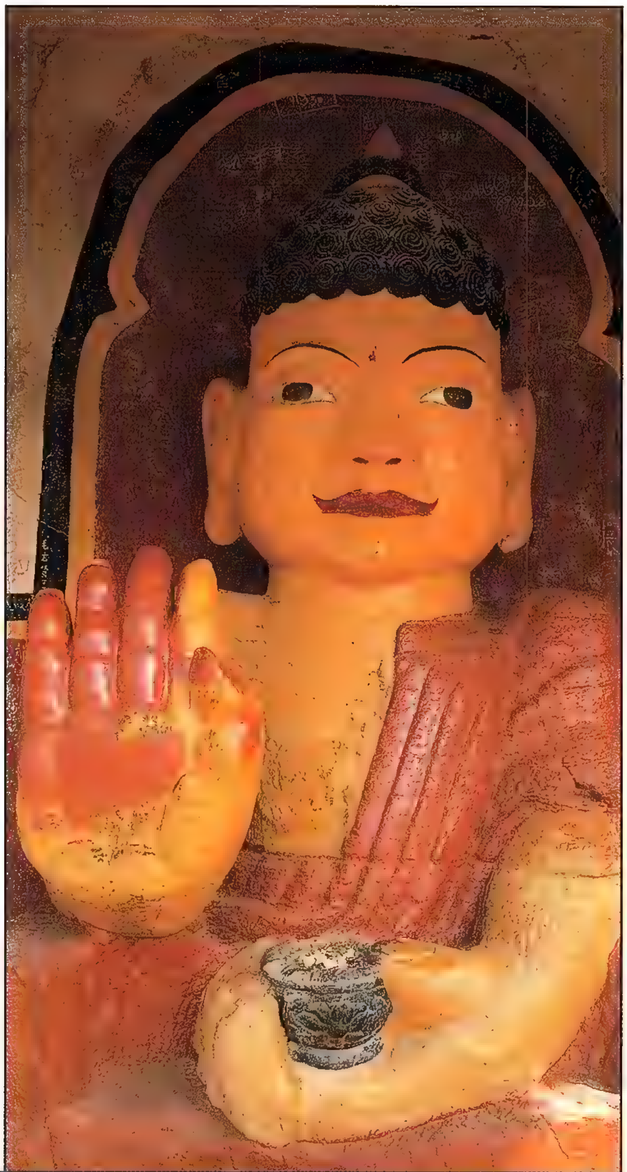

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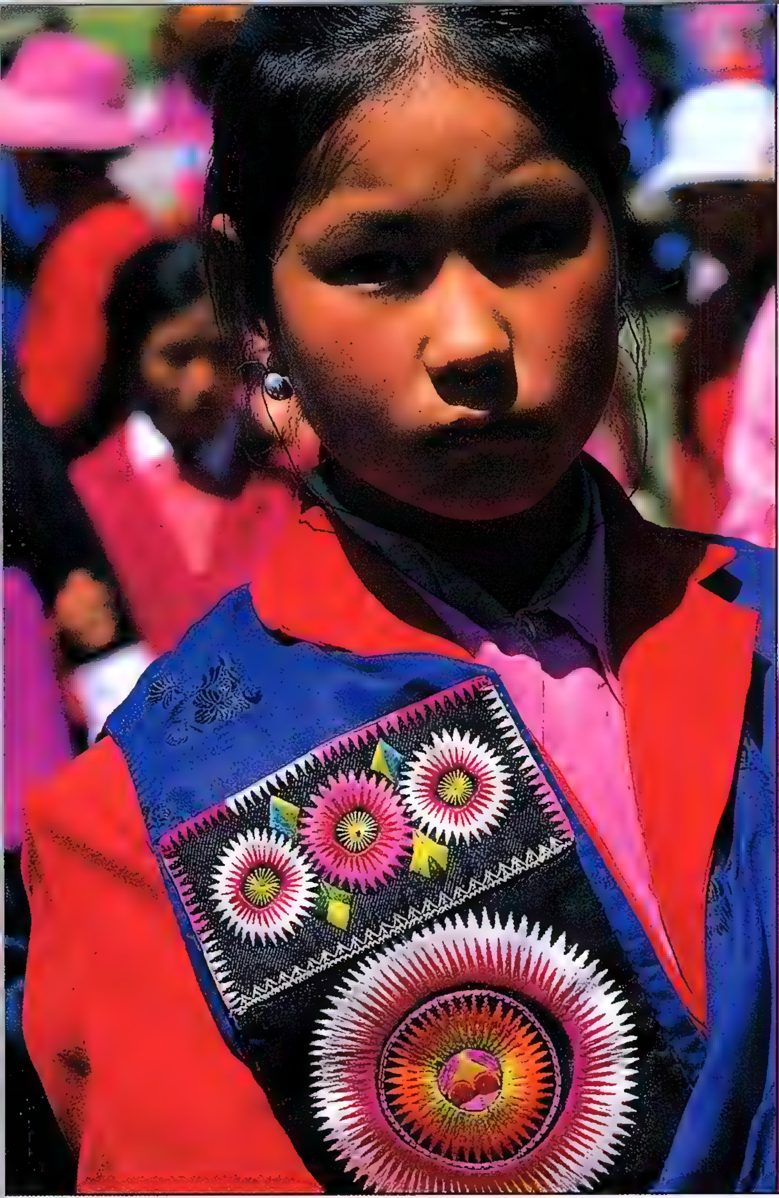

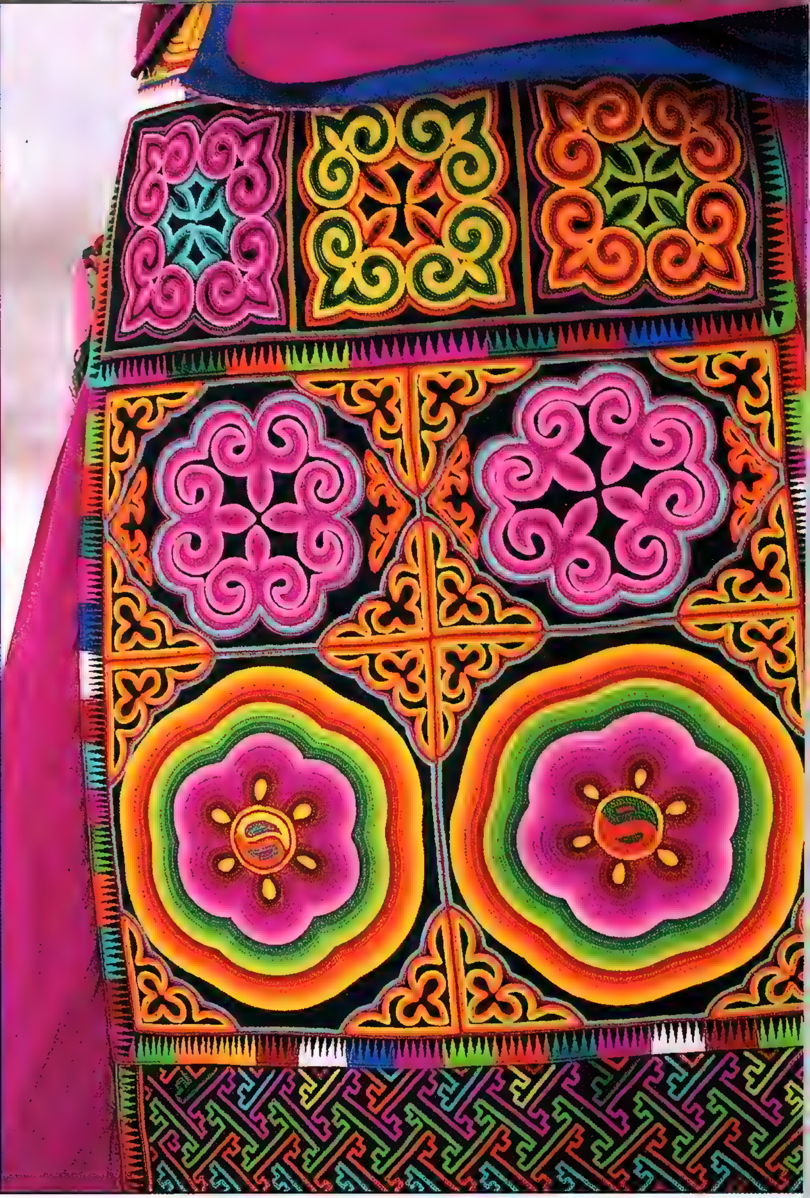

Crossing the Yellow River in an Ox-Hide Raft

Ox-hide rafts are made of the skin of a whole ox, without the head and hooves. After removing the fat and drying the skin, it becomes a sturdy and unique raft. The ferryman lay diagonally on his stomach on the raft and propelled it to the opposite bank with his hands, while his feet served as the rudder. He was quite at ease with his job. As he worked, he sang a song and skilfully avoided the rapids and whirlpools in the river.

With the construction of the new bridge, the ox-hide raft's days were numbered. I wished to be among the last batch of passengers to use such a raft and experience the danger and thrill of crossing the river in this unusual way. After I had wormed my way clumsily into the ox-hide, the opening was tied up. I began to breathe with some difficulty, partly because of lack of oxygen and partly because of my excitement. Then suddenly I felt a waft of fresh air. The ferryman had inflated the raft through one of the ox's legs. Through the ox skin, I could see the red blot of the sun and hear the laughter of those on the river bank.

Before long, I felt my back bump against something hard and then something soft as the ferryman hauled the raft into the river. When the raft was afloat on the river, it was quite pleasant and cool inside the ox skin. I curled up and let the waves toss me up and down. Occasionally the raft was darkened when a wave splashed over it. The ferryman would then increase the rhythm of his hands as he propelled the raft forward. Crossing the Yellow River in an ox skin was indeed a rare experience. The 10 minutes soon passed, and when I was hauled ashore and crawled out of the ox skin, I was on the western side of the Yellow River.

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The Relics of Ancient Cultures

After crossing the Yellow River into Qinghai Province, we travelled for more than 30 kilometres across Mount Laji and arrived at Gushan, an important garrison town called Longzhi in the Tang Dynasty. The ancient town was very unusual in its layout. The town wall had only three gates on the eastern, western and northern sides; there was no gate on the southern side. The town wall, made of rammed earth, was in ruins. The town had yielded a great number of cultural relics: painted pottery jars and basins from the Han Dynasty; bricks with rope impressions on them from the Northern and Southern Dynasties; bricks, tiles, eave tiles, basins, jars and coins from the Kaiyuan reign of the Tang Dynasty; and bricks, tiles, pottery, pots and jars from the Song Dynasty.

There were also things used by the army stationed there during the various dynasties, such as carbonized iron articles, cinders, animal bones and stone pestels. Had the Minhe County authorities not begun to pay attention to protecting the cultural relics, what remained of the earthen town wall would have been pulled down by the farmers and the earth used for building latrines and animal pens. Standing on the town wall, we saw no chariots and courier horses galloping at full speed, but only the terraced fields on Mount Laji, golden wheat fields, green autumn crops and the snow-enshrouded peak of the mountain. Below the mountain, men and women were busy harvesting rapeseed plants.

About 39 kilometres north of Gushan is Minhe, a town of ancient culture and the eastern gateway to Qinghai Province. As early as 1932, when the Swedish archaeologist named Johann Gunnar Andersson came here, he discovered a great number of stone-age artifacts and named the civilization of this area Macheng Culture. Later, several dozen more archaeological sites were found in the county, and tens of thousands of relics unearthed. The county museum is too small to display all the finds. As a result, painted and unpainted pottery articles were pitifully piled together without a proper place to store them.

Preserved in the county museum were some extremely rare artifacts. There was, for example, an oddly shaped plain pottery jar decorated with a human figure. The jar looked as if someone had deliberately tried to flatten it. The oddness of the jar was enhanced by a sculpted nude figure on its body. The four limbs of the human figure were spread out, and the figure had a male face but female sex organs. Many specialists have studied it, but none can explain it. There were so many pottery shards in the cultivated fields at Macheng that one could stoop down and pick one up at random.

The Flower Festival of the Tu People

From Minhe we travelled through Shanzhou (Ledu) to Baimasi and then northward to the Huzhu Tu Autonomous County. There is still no definite conclusion as regards the origin of the Tu people. Most scholars, however, maintain that they are descendants of the Tuyuhun people, who lived in the Qinghai-Tibet area during the Han and Tang dynasties and later intermarried with the Mongolians. This explains why the Tu people have both the daring character of the Mongolians and the gentle character of the Tuyuhun people. The Tu are also good singers and dancers. A common saying here goes: "The babies learn to sing before they learn to speak; the girls learn to dance before they learn to walk."

A few days before and after the sixth day of the sixth lunar month, "flower" parties are held in several places in the county as part of the Tu people's Flower Festival. When we went to one of the parties, we found "flowers" blooming everywhere on the grass-covered hills and in the forests. The "flowers" were actually the multi-coloured clothes of the Tu girls, the shirts of the Tu boys, the sunshades of the singers, and the colourful costumes, ornaments and felt hats of the singers and dancers, which together formed flower-like clusters. People moving along the hill paths were like colourful streams flowing towards the party.

When the flower party began, men and women formed themselves into many small singing groups. When one began to sing, he or she was joined by all the others. They sang songs consisting of questions and answers under the sun, by a spring or in the woods. The songs echoed one another and were mixed together, creating a warm and jubilant mood.

When the sun went down and the moon started to rise, the hills and woods were enveloped in a thin mist. The singing became softer and more poetical. The girls and boys who had found the ones they loved during the daytime singing now began to sing in a loving and

Embroidered articles made by Tu women are unique, with most of them abstract in design (1). ■ A multi-coloured design on a black background is the most common style for Tu embroidery (2). ■ Tu women participate in a "flower" party, which is held on a slope or in the woods (3). ■ A mother has come to a "flower" party with her daughter in the hopes of finding an ideal son-in-law (4).

sweet voice, which drew them gently together. According to Tu custom, at this time the girl should give the boy an embroidered pouch, and the boy should give the girl something in return as a symbol of his love. The two then disappear together into the woods.

A Singular Tu Wedding Ceremony

During our time in the Huzhu Tu Autonomous County, we also were invited to attend a Tu wedding. The wedding party began with a dozen or so Tu women who took turns displaying the bride's dowry to all the guests. The dowry included dozens of coats with colourful sleeves and felt hats embroidered with flowers. A small mirror was sewn on each of the hats, signifying that the wearer of the hat could see and think clearly. There were also waist bands embroidered with all kinds of flowers, birds and animals.

All Tu girls are expert embroiderers. They begin to learn needlework when they are about 10, embroidering pillow cases, shoes, pouches, ribbons and so on. The flowers they embroidered were so beautiful that one could almost smell their fragrance. The birds and animals were vivid and lifelike, and there were also a variety of abstract designs in dazzling colours. Like other Tu girls during their wedding parties, Lari Jinsuo, the bride, put her needlework out on display for everybody to see.

The marriage ceremony was held that night. The bridegroom came with a Naxin (someone who speaks and sings well) to the bride's home to fetch the bride. When they arrived, they found the front gate tightly closed against them. There were people standing on the gate, in trees and on the wall enclosing the courtyard. Behind the gate were women from the bride's family singing questions, to which the Naxin had to sing answers in response. This lasted for a long time and the gate did not open until the women were satisfied with his answers. As the Naxin and the bridegroom began to walk through the gate, a basin of cold water was splashed on them from above, a gesture meant to wish the newlyweds happiness.

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Inside the bride's house, the Naxin and bridegroom were each offered three cups of tea. As they were drinking their second cup, the window curtains were drawn apart and women from the bride's family began to sing questions and answers to ridicule the Naxin. The songs also warned the bridegroom that if he did not treat his wife well, her family would make him pay for it. After the ridiculing was over, the women pulled the Naxin out to the courtyard and began to sing and dance with him, imitating eagles in flight. They were then joined by the young men, and together they danced around the flower beds. The young men were agile, and the women swung their colourful sleeves like peacocks spreading their tails.

As the moment got nearer to the time when the bride would have to bid farewell to her girlhood for ever, the songs became more melancholy. Amidst the sound of these mellow songs, the bridegroom walked into the bride's room to dress her hair. This is a ceremony in which he must comb the bride's hair three times up and three times down and then comb his own hair three times. When he came out of the room, the bride's family began to help the bride dress.

The bridegroom was then given gifts of clothes, hats, shoes, socks and belts by the bride's father, who also put them on for him. At about 4:00 in the morning, the bride was helped to the main hall, where she and the groom, standing side by side, bowed three times to bid farewell to her home, family, relatives and neighbours. It was then time for the newlyweds to leave. As they were about to depart, the women came out to say goodbye to them, everyone in tears.

Upon arriving at the groom's house, the bride was helped out of the carriage. At that moment, people from the bride's family quickly began to push the bride into the gate before the groom could get in, while those from the groom's family did the same to him. It is traditionally believed that the one who enters the house first will hold sway over the other party in the future. This was then followed by the formal wedding ceremony in which the new couple kowtowed to Heaven and Earth.

When the sun rose, the wedding banquet began. Members of the groom's family offered wine to the bride's family while singing songs of well-wishing. In return, those from the bride's family sang songs in praise of the groom's family. The drinking and singing reached a climax after three rounds of wine. As the two families drank together, they sang question-and-answer songs again. This went on and on until late in the afternoon. It was then time to thank the go-between and eat the "commencement of the marriage" noodles. Before those from the bride's family were to leave for their own village, they had to drink three cups of "horse-mounting wine" with the host.

An Exorcism Dance at Youning Monastery

Youning Monastery, located about 15 kilometres to the northeast of the county town of Huzhu, is the second largest monastery in Qinghai Province, next only to Ta'er (Kumbum) Monastery. Since its founding in 1604, Buddhist festivals have been held every year in the monastery. The most important one is the Exorcism Dance Festi-

The ceremony for fetching the bride is usually held at night (1). ■ *A bride bids farewell to her parents and girlhood friends (2).* ■ *The roasted bread of the Tu people is a bit like Russian bread (3).*

val, which falls on the 14th day of the first lunar month and always attracts tens of thousands of spectators. In order not to miss the opportunity to see it, we started out in the early morning, although it was snowing heavily. On the way, we saw people on horseback, tractors, bicycles and yak-carts travelling in a steady stream in the direction of Youning. The monastery was already crowded with people when we got there. Accompanied by the abbot, we had to zigzag our way through the crowds in order to get inside.

To the accompaniment of long *suona* horns and booming drums, four warriors dressed in white robes, their faces hidden behind masks painted with human skulls, walked out to start the ceremony. These were the vanguard, coming out to clear the road for the gods. The vanguard was followed by the Dance of All Gods, performed by 15 dancers wearing masks representing the gods in Heaven and on earth. Among these gods were the Ox-headed Arhat, the Mule Guardian, the Southern Guardian, the Crow, the Fawn, the King of Animals, the Ox King, the Sea Whale, and the historical character Guan Yu, the God of War. Imitating fighting movements, they engaged the evil ghosts and devils in a fierce battle until complete victory was won.

This was followed by 15 more gods, who performed the Divine Dance for Upholding the Truth, which extolled the immense power of the Sakya (White Land) sect of Buddhism and was performed for the purpose of defending peace. The next dance, the Tangchinba Dance, was performed by 13 dancers wearing black robes and black hats, each holding a seven-star sword. As they danced, they recited scriptures. The 13 lamas who were dressed as gods had actually begun chanting scriptures some three weeks earlier, on the 23rd day of the 12th lunar month. During that time of continuous reciting, their food had to be brought to the scripture hall so as not to interrupt their practice.

Next came a spectacular parade led by another 13 people dressed as gods, who cut out dough figurines and took them to the Truth-Upholding Hall to burn them in a fire. Behind the 13 gods were more than 80 dancing lamas carrying flags, beating drums and playing music. When the parade came out of the monastery, it was greeted by a multitude of laypeople, men and women, young and old, who kowtowed and recited scriptures on both sides of the road. Some lifted up the edges of the lamas' robes and touched them, believing that this would protect them against illness and misfortune.

An even larger crowd had gathered at the shed where dough figurines were being burned. Waving a whisk in his hand, the leading lama threw the dough figurines into the shed while chanting mantras. As flames rose, drums began to thump and music was played. The crowd cheered because evil had been eliminated and they could live in peace for a whole year.

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At the end of the religious activities, thousands of Tu people gathered in the woods in front of the monastery, where they drank wine, chatted with friends, met their loved ones or engaged in trade until late in the afternoon.

The Ancient City of Xining

Leaving the mountain villages of the Tu people, we drove south along the Shatang River. A red glow suddenly appeared in the western sky. We mounted a slope and saw the city of Xining – a long stretch of flickering lights sprawled out like a silvery river.

Exhausted by the busy schedule of the last few days, we had a good night's sleep in the hotel. The following day, a friend came to tell us about some of Xining's most well-known sites: a mosque, the largest in Qinghai Province; the Military Reviewing Tower built by Tufawur, ruler of the State of Southern Liang; and the world-famous Ta'er Monastery, the original home of the Gelugpa (Yellow Hat) sect of Buddhism. Xining was already an important frontier town even back in the Qin and Han dynasties (221 B.C.-A.D. 220). It became Shancheng County in the Tang Dynasty and a gateway to the area inhabited by ethnic minorities.

Following the trail of Li Daoyuan (465-527), a traveller in the Northern Wei Dynasty, we left Xining through its northern gate and soon came upon a giant Buddha standing by a hill on the banks of the Huangshui River. Sculpted by mountain torrents and erosion, the huge rock was known as the Flickering Buddha to the local people, because it is said that the rock originally looked like a Buddha to anyone spiritually linked with the Buddha,

A religious parade ends in the mountains, where the ceremony for burning dough figurines was held (1). ■ *Devoted lamas perform a religious ceremony in the drifting snow (2).* ■ *Girls masquerade as "gods" and "ghosts" (3).* ■ *Tu people brave heavy snow and come from all directions to Youning Monastery, to take part in this important religious festival (4).* ■ *Tu girls in winter attire (5)*

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but looked like a pagoda to everyone else. After some chiselling, it has now become a majestic statue of the Buddha in the eyes of everyone.

Buddhism spread to the confluence area of the Yellow River and Huangshui River during the Eastern Han Dynasty (25-220). Shrines and temples were built as the centres of Buddhist activities. With the opening of the Southern Silk Road and the Tangbo Road, Xining became an important hub for communications. It is said that on their way to Tubo, both Princesses Wen Cheng and Jin Cheng interrupted their journey to stop at temples here and pray to the Buddha.

Translated by Tang Bowen

The Great Mosque at Dongguan in Xining is the largest in Qinghai Province (1). ■ *As one goes further west, the mountains become increasingly desolate (2).* ■ *The frontier town called Shancheng in the Tang Dynasty has become today's prosperous city of Xining (3).* ■ *A valley in the upper reaches of the Huangshui River (4)*

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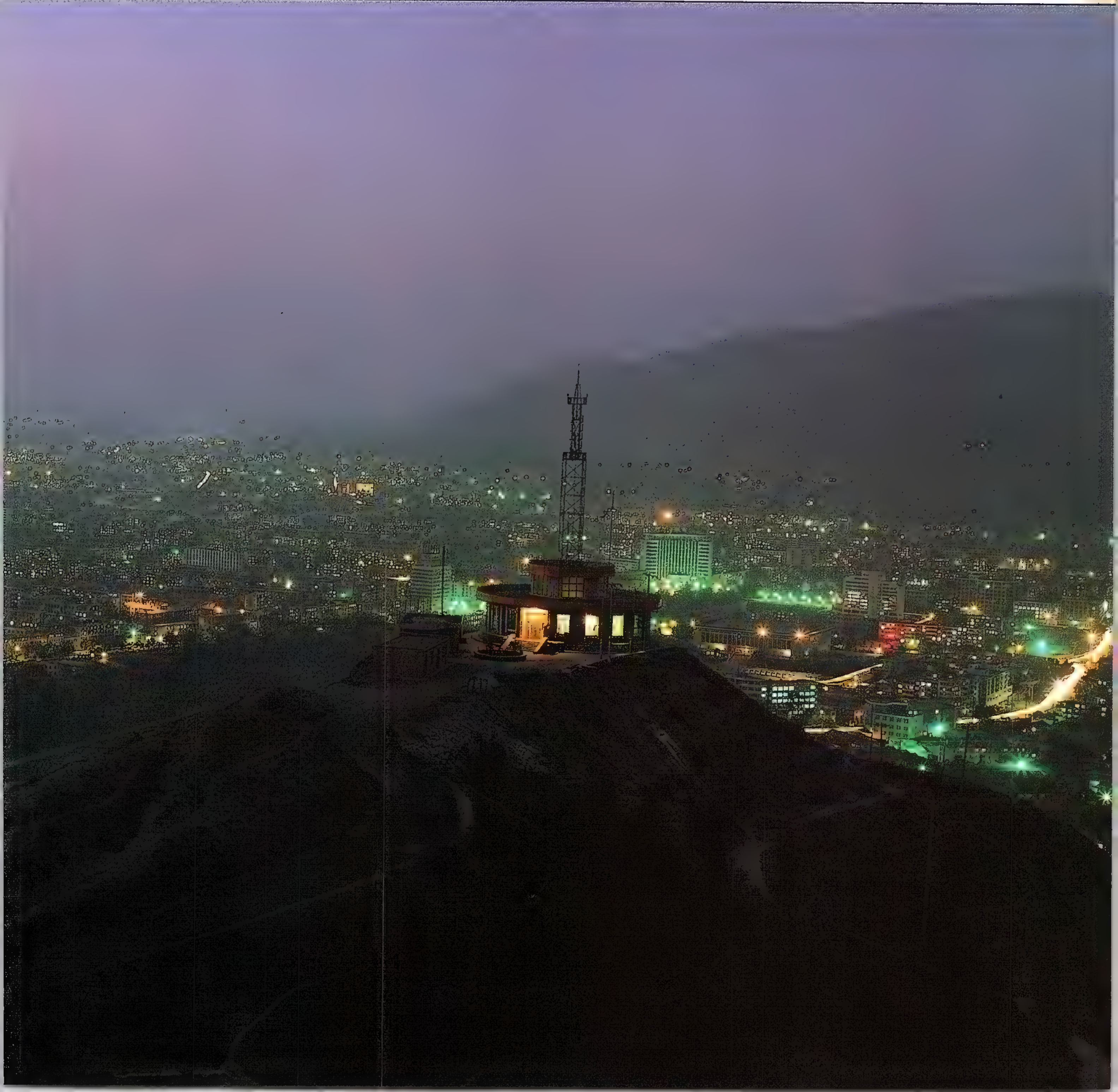
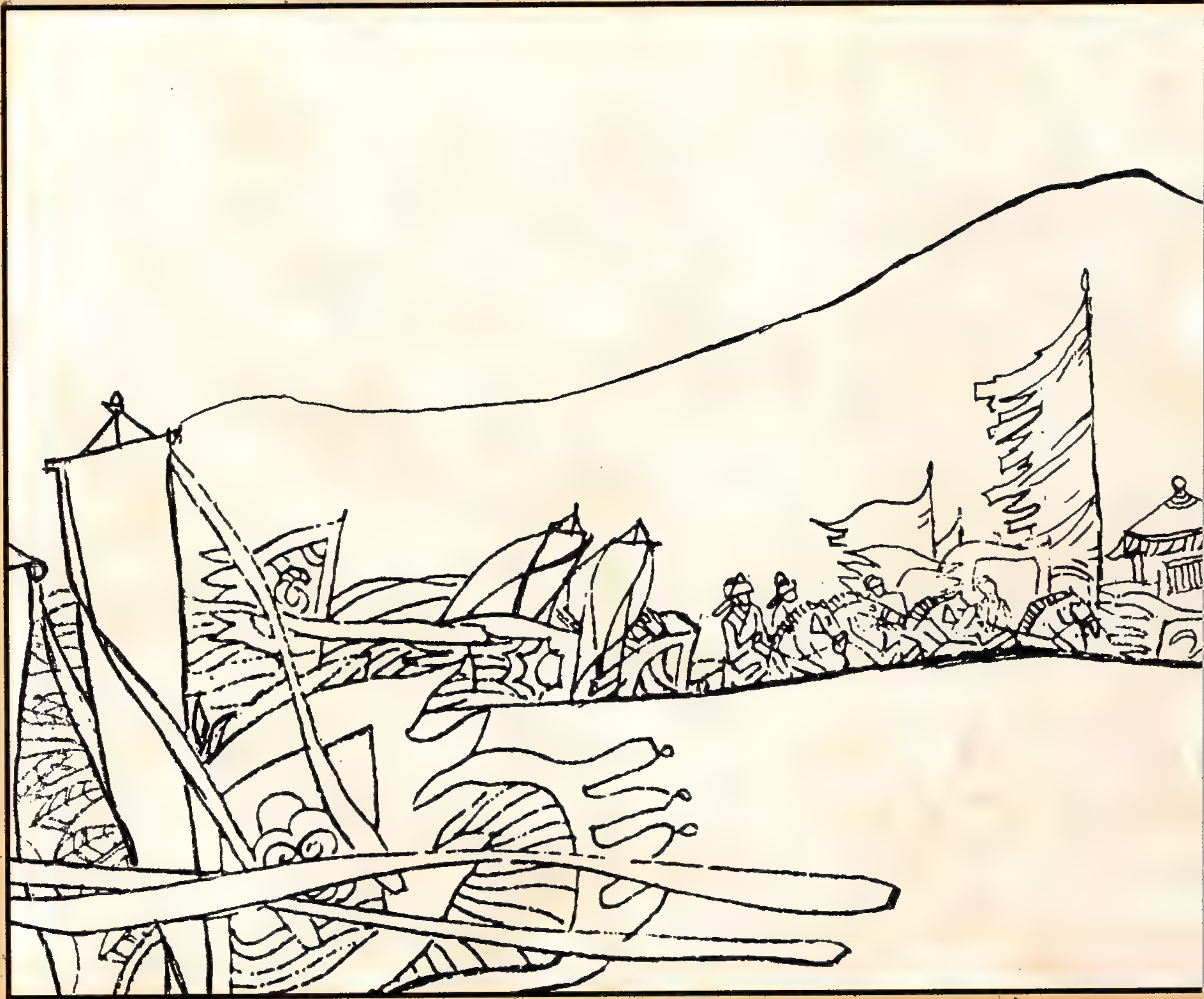


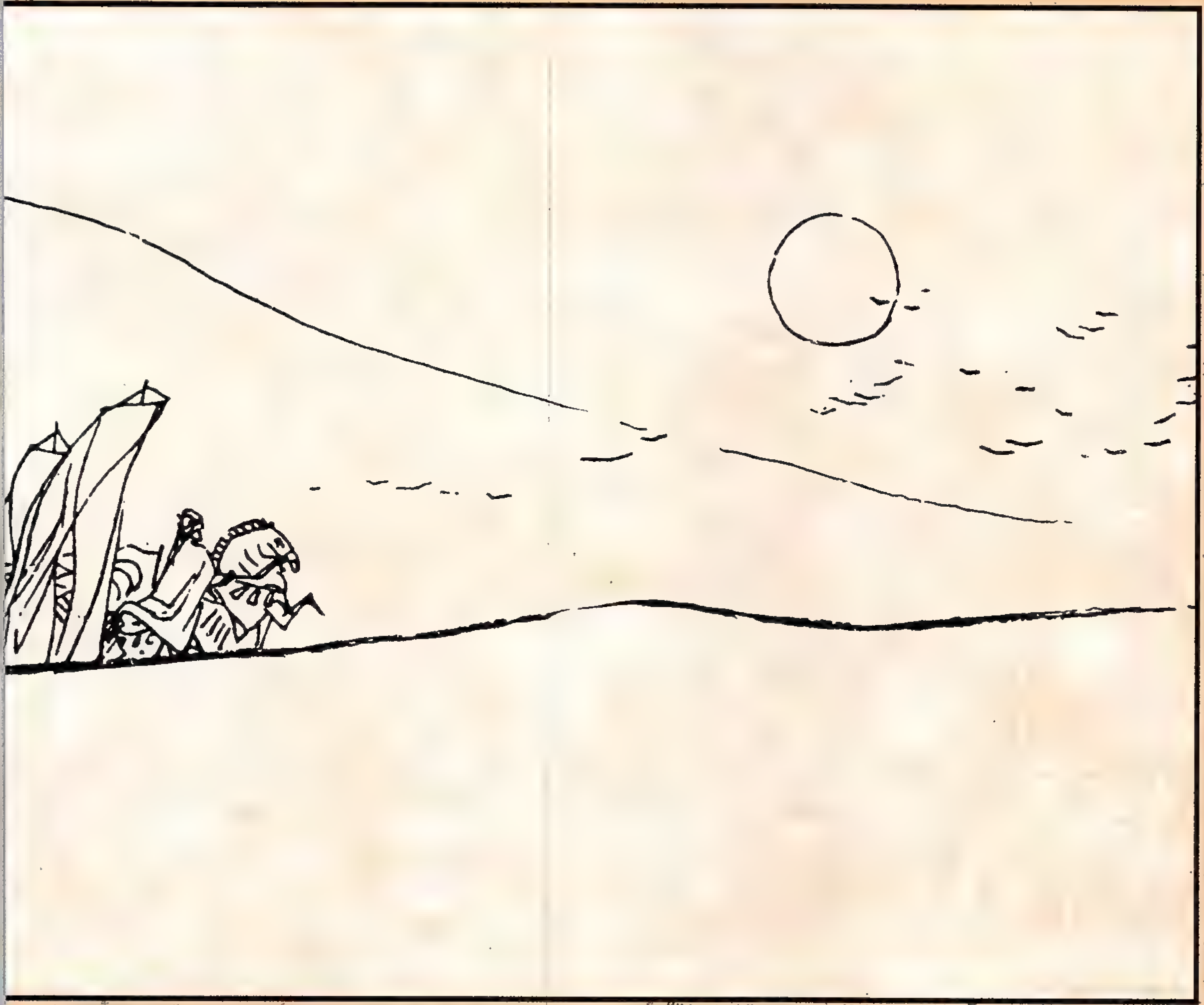
CHAPTER FOUR

Clear Skies and a Vast Lake Be



After crossing Sun and Moon Mountain, Princess Wen Cheng's entourage entered the territory of the Kingdom of Tubo. All she could see ahead of her was an endless stretch of desolate land and snow-capped mountains.

nd Sun and Moon Mountain



This section of our travels took us northwest of Xining to explore the area around the vast Qinghai Lake. The first place on our itinerary was Riyue (Sun and Moon Mountain, which once marked the boundary between the Tang Empire and the Kingdom of Tubo. The mountain was a necessary point of passage on the ancient Tangbo Road, therefore Princesses Wen Cheng and Jin Cheng, as well as various envoys shuttling between the two places, entered Tubo from here.

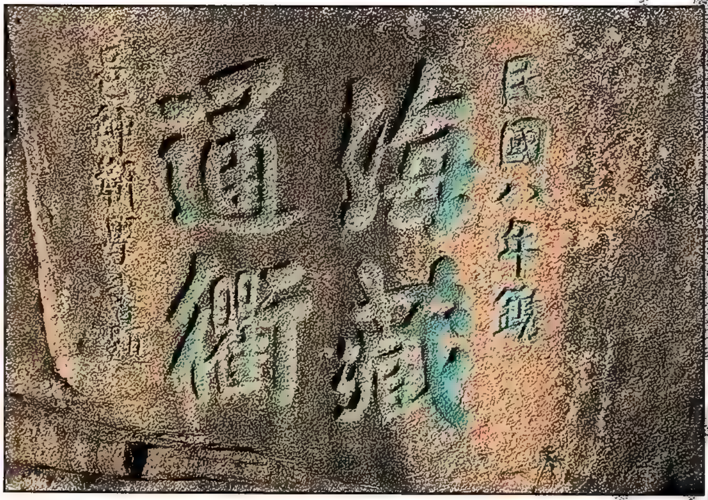
According to *The New Annals of the Tang Dynasty*, after crossing the mountain, the Tangbo Road continued its way from Zhenwu via the Weichi River and Kuba Lake, went on 45 kilometres to the Moli Post, then further past the Princess' Buddha Hall and Dafeichuan and finally went another 140 kilometres to the Nalu Post.

Legends say that today's Weichi River is the so-called Daotang (Backward Flowing) River, which was formed by the bitter tears of the homesick Princess Wen Cheng. Kuba Lake is present-day Gahai Lake, and Dafeichuan was once a valley soaked with the blood of soldiers who fought in battles between the Tang Empire and Tubo Kingdom during the early years of the Tang Dynasty.

Today the place is crisscrossed with irrigation channels and blessed with rich soil and luxuriant grass. People no longer fight wars, but live in peace and happiness. Elaborately dressed Tibetan women walk down the streets, their valuable silver ornaments and jewels tinkling all the way. In the evening young men and women dance around bonfires on the grassland. Next, we drove westward to visit Qinghai Lake and Bird Island, where we savoured the delicious taste of fish from the lake.

After driving west for 40 kilometres along the Qinghai-Tibet Highway, we entered Xishi Gorge, the first strategic pass on the Qinghai-Tibet route. The Huangshui River rushes eastward through the gorge, and weirdly-shaped rocks stood on precipices on either bank.

After leaving the city of Xining, we made our first stop at Fo'er (Buddha) Precipice, so named because the rock face has sculptures of ten giant Buddhas. On the upper part is a sculpture of Sakyamuni, his four warrior attendants standing valiantly with their weapons on either side. Judging from the sculptures' meticulous workmanship and sketchy lines, they looked to be works from the Song and Yuan dynasties. After a 40-kilometre ride towards the southeast, we came to the famed Sun and Moon Mountain. Before the Tang Dynasty it was known as Red Ridge, because of the colour of its rocks. At an altitude of 3,520 metres above sea level, Sun and Moon Mountain is part of the Qilian Mountain Range. It is also the watershed for Qinghai Province's inland rivers and rivers flowing to other provinces.



3

On the Top of Sun and Moon Mountain

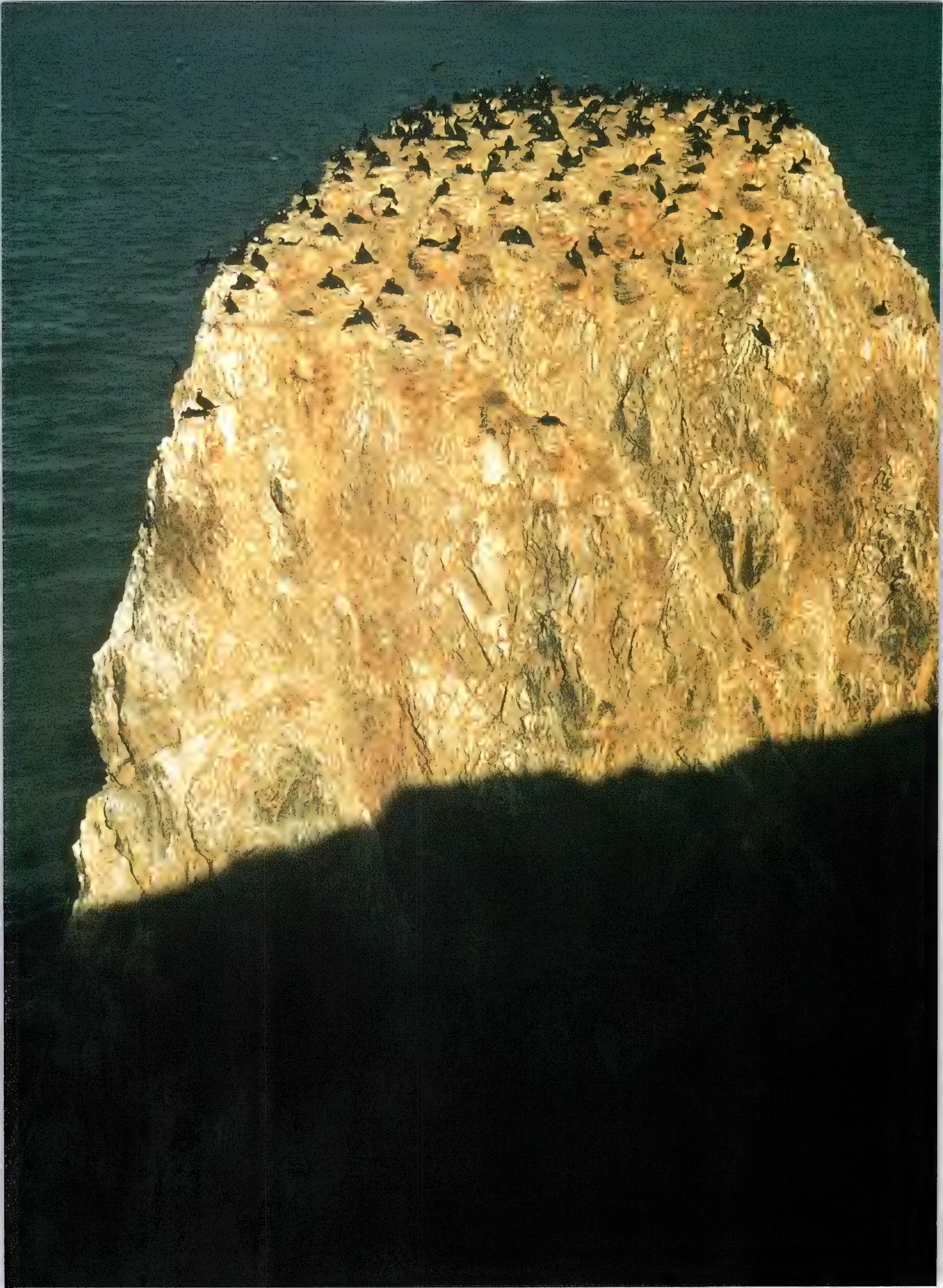
We climbed up to the mountain summit and were immediately struck by a strong northeasterly wind. For the first time we felt cold, although it was mid-summer. On the southern slope undulating hills extended endlessly, and a white snowline ran through the middle. No wonder local people like to say: "After scaling Sun and Moon Mountain, you see a totally different picture."

Legend has it that when Princess Wen Cheng came to the summit of this mountain, she got out of her carriage and looked around. Behind her the scenery was misty and obscure. The forests in Xishi Gorge and the willows of Yaoshui Gully which she had passed were no longer visible, let alone Chang'an, her beloved capital. Before her were rolling snow-capped mountains. The desolate scene filled her with sadness, and tears coursed down her cheeks. She then recalled the words of her father, the emperor, when he gave her a precious mirror wth a sun and moon design on it just before her departure: "Whenever you miss me or your home, you only need to look in this mirror to see us." So she drew out the mirror, but alas, she could see no Chang'an, only her own tearful face. With grief and indignation she threw the mirror down the precipice.

Thereafter, the local people began calling Red Ridge Sun and Moon Mountain. To commemorate Princess Wen Cheng, in 1980 two pavilions called "Sun" and "Moon" were built at the foot of the mountain. Inside the pavilions there are statues of Princess Wen Cheng and Songtsan Gambo, murals and Tibetan *tangka* paintings. Though they are modern works, their craftsmanship is superb.

About 10 kilometres south of Sun and Moon Mountain, we came upon a stream that was flowing from east to west rather than the normal west to east. This is explained by another story about Princess Wen Cheng. On the mountain's summit, the princess decided to ride

At the foot of Sun and Moon Mountain, there are two pavilions named "Sun" and "Moon" built by later generations in commemoration of Princess Wen Cheng (1, by Huang Jixian). ■ There are many stone carvings about the ancient Tangbo Road at Yaoshi Gorge (2). ■ The legendary Backward Flowing River was said to have been formed from the tears of the homesick princess (3). ■ Many of the casually placed stones on the summit are inscribed with the handwriting of modern calligraphers (4).



on horseback instead of sitting in a carriage. Still grief-stricken, she shed tears all the way down to the bottom, which soon formed a stream that flew backward from east to west. In actual fact, the formation of the stream is related to the movement of the earth's crust on the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau. Tens of millions of years ago, the water in Qinghai Lake flew eastward to the Yellow River. The movement of the Himalayan Mountains caused the creation of Sun and Moon Mountain, which blocked the lake's outflow and formed a small basin around the lake, thus changing the course of water flowing into the lake from east to west.

Along the Shores of Qinghai Lake

After crossing the stream and then driving westward for 30 kilometres, we came to Qinghai Lake – China's biggest inland salt lake. The lake seemed to extend as far as the horizon. Herds of cattle and flocks of sheep were grazing on the rippling grasslands, and yellow rape plants added a golden trim to the blue lake. On the edges of the rape fields were row after row of beehives, with swarms of bees flying between them. As this is an ideal place for honey-picking, beekeepers come here from Jiangsu, Zhejiang, Yunnan, Guizhou, Sichuan and other provinces. Because of the many flowers here, the honey is of fine quality and the daily honey output is exceedingly great.

Passing through the rape fields we went to the lakeside to enjoy the scenery. From afar the lake looked like a green carpet, but close-up it was as stormy as the sea. An islet is set in the centre of the lake called Haixin Hill. Temples have been built there since the Han Dynasty (206 B.C.-A.D. 220), and when the lake is ice-bound in winter the monks come out to purchase food and other necessities sufficient to last a year. For the rest of the year they live in seclusion. During the ice-bound winter, herdsmen nearby drive their cattle and sheep to Haixin Hill to be used as sacrifices for the Buddha.

Back in the Tang Dynasty, a general named Geshuhan built a city of supreme power on the islet, however we guessed it only served the purpose of displaying his military might rather than functioning as a fortress.

We arrived just at the time when the fishing boats were returning home. Huso sturgeons leaped about in the boats. A variety of carp, huso sturgeon have a yellowish or greyish-brown back and irregular brown spots on its sides. As it is a scaleless fish, local people also call it "the naked carp of Qinghai Lake". Over time, its scales have disappeared in order to help preserve its body temperature in the cold lake waters. Thus evolved, it is able to survive in rivers and lakes at 3,000 to 5,000 metres above sea level. It grows slowly, however, taking 12 to 13 years to gain just one kilogram of weight.

The fishermen there offered us a dish of steamed fish. Though it was cooked with only salt and ginger, it was uniquely delicious, the meat fine and tender. The fishermen said they liked eating fish heads best, thus they usually throw the bodies back in the lake to feed the live fish. While savouring the fish, we listened with interest to the stories the fishermen told.

2

Previous pages: *The Qieji Grassland, just southwest of Gonghe County*

All kinds of birds gather on Bird Island (1). ■ *Buddhist practices are carried out on this lakeside hillock (2).* ■ *The abundance of golden rape flowers here attracts numerous beekeepers from other provinces (3).*

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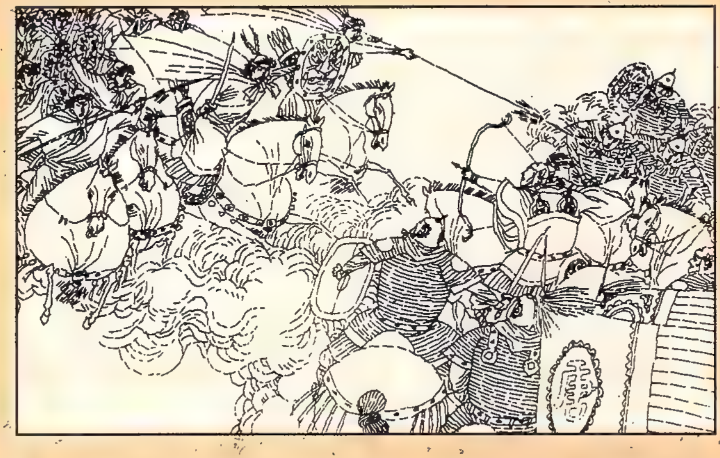

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In the depth of winter, they said, they dig holes in the ice. With neither fishing rods nor bait, they simply use empty hooks or even knotted rope to fish, often catching up to 50 kilograms per day. These days, however, the number of fish in Qinghai Lake is dwindling, thus measures are being adopted to increase the population.

Tibetan Prayers and Bird Island

After our meal of fresh fish we planned to visit Bird Island, but just then we chanced to witness some Tibetans who were praying at the lake. Herdsmen who had come on horseback were gathered at the foot of a hill, holding red silk, white *hatas* or streamers. They walked towards a spot they call Erbo – actually a pile of big stones in which banners, wooden swords and spears had been stuck. This shrine was for worshipping both the mountain god and the lake god. Enveloped in curling smoke, they turned prayer wheels and chanted scriptures as they walked around the shrine. They then

Galloping horses and rolling dark clouds partially recreate the atmosphere of an ancient battlefield (1). ■ *After several bloody battles with 40,000 Tubo troops, a crack force of 100,000 Tang soldiers was totally defeated (2).* ■ *The Qieji Grassland is dotted with white Tibetan tents in summer (3).*

3

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3

kowtowed and prostrated, praying for a good harvest, prosperity and happiness. The ropes over the shrine were hung with streamers and coloured wool.

Following these worshipping activities, horse races, shooting and other sports events were held. Since entertainment is rare on the grasslands and herdsmen live and work far apart, they will not miss such a good opportunity to enjoy themselves, meet people and do some shopping. The women take this opportunity to show off their beautiful clothes and good looks to their neighbours, whom they seldom see ordinarily. They put on their most georgeous robes and wear their most precious jewels, the bowl-shaped silver ornaments on their backs tinkling melodiously as they walk. It has been estimated that the pearls, agates, silver ornaments and so on worn by a Tibetan woman weigh at least five kilograms and can have a value of tens of thousands of yuan. Tibetan women like to wear all the precious and beautiful things they have to display their wealth.

A trip to Bird Island is a must for all visitors to Qinghai Lake. In the northwest corner of the lake there are two islets standing opposite to each other which form Bird Island. The islet on the west side is called Haixi Hill, or Egg Islet. Shaped like a camel's hump, it covers an area of just 0.1 square kilometres and rises 10 metres above the lake's surface. The islet on the east side is called Haixipi. Shaped like a springboard, it is three or four times bigger than Egg Islet.

As the habitat of about 100,000 birds, the islands bustle with activity. Flocks of birds were flying everywhere, some circling over the sea, others skimming the surface of the water looking for food. The sound of birds calling to each other filled the air.

Once a Battlefield, Now Fertile Land

From Qinghai Lake we drove southward for some 40 kilometres and came to Gonghe, the capital of the Hainan Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture. Princess Hong Hua, daughter of an imperial clansman of the Tang emperor Taizong (r. 627-649), who married a Tuyuhun chieftain, built a hall for worshipping the Buddha here for Princess Wen Cheng, who was a pious Buddhist follower. Princess Wen Cheng had taken a month's rest in the hall before she continued on her way westward to Tibet. Despite our inquiries, we could find no trace of the hall. All one can see these days in Gonghe are modern buildings, as a new city of tens of thousands of people has emerged on this formerly desolate grassland. Today Gonghe is a communications hub linking up Yushu and Golog in the south to Xining in the north.

5

After taking a quick look around we left the city, passed through a flat tableland and arrived at the ancient battlefield where the soldiers of the Tang Empire and Tubo Kingdom once fought. Under the grey, cloudy sky, bugle calls are no longer heard, but are instead replaced by the resonant songs of shepherdesses. In place of military tents, there are now commercial tents selling all kinds of goods, while camels graze leisurely nearby. Merchants from counties and prefectures in the area were holding a commodities fair there. Beautifully attired Tibetans were buying crates of fruit, bags of refined sugar, dresses, bolts of cloth and other dress-making materials.

More than one thousand years later, Tibetans and Han Chinese are now jointly building irrigation channels, turning the ancient battlefield into fertile land. Tibetan women are now freed from the burden of fetching water from 10 kilometres away with rough yak-hair ropes and wooden buckets, braving the cold wind, scorching heat and flying sand.

At night bonfires were lit on the grassland. Both Tibetans and Han Chinese, herdsmen and workers hold get-togethers and dances. During these so-called "social" dances, the Tibetan men and women maintain their own traditional style of dance.

Tibetan women not only wear elaborate clothes, but also pay particular attention to their hairstyle. Whenever they go to fairs or parties, they plait their braids meticulously. The scores of slender braids on their heads show their sense of beauty and their superb hair-doing skills. Tibetan women are also fond of having their photograph taken. Instead of dodging a photographer, they instead pose for the camera; some even voluntarily gave us their addresses, hoping to get pictures of themselves in their best attire.

Translated by Anne Yan

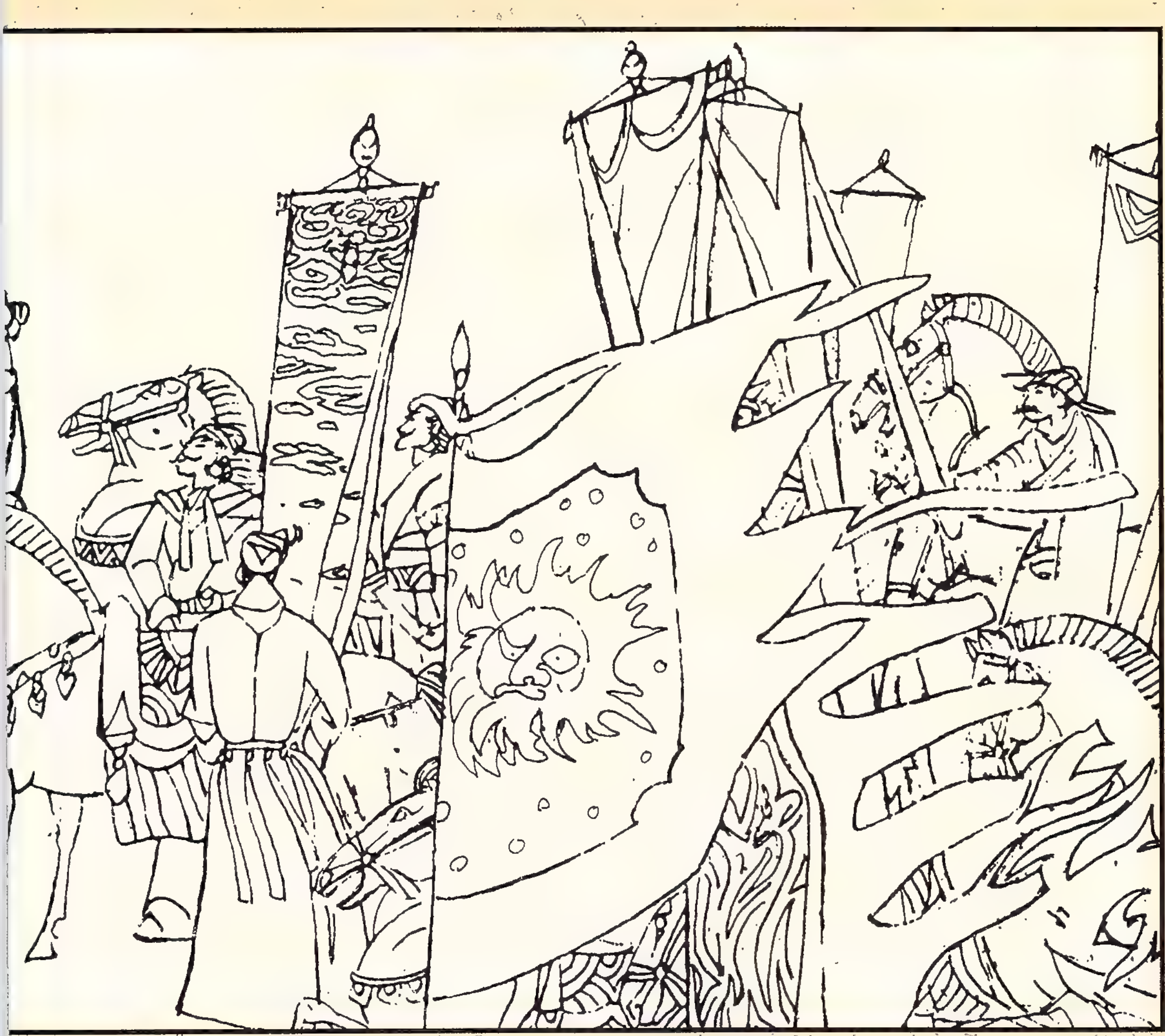
Silver ornaments worn by Tibetan girls are all exquisitely made (1). ■ Dafeichuan today is a fertile field crisscrossed with irrigation channels (2). ■ Living on the grassland deep in the mountains, Tibetan girls seldom see other people, therefore when the opportunity comes, they take advantage of it and wear all the ornaments they have (3). ■ Tibetan women living west of Qinghai Lake look slightly different from Tibetans in other areas (4). ■ From sparsely-populated grasslands to the summertime fairs, Tibetan women find everything novel and interesting (5).

CHAPTER FIVE

A Haven of Peace at the Source

Between Ngoring and Gyaring lakes at the source of the Yellow River, the Tibetan King Songtsan Gambo met with the Tang Princess Wen Cheng. They had a grand wedding ceremony in Baihai Palace, which was located between the two lakes.

f the Yellow River



In the year 641, Princess Wen Cheng, accompanied by Minister of Rites Li Daozong, arrived at the source of the Yellow River. It was there that the Tibetan King Songtsan Gambo "led his troops towards Baihai to meet the princess" (*The New Annals of the Tang Dynasty, Tubo Section*), and then finally "met her in person at Heyuan with Li Daozong" (*The Old Annals of the Tang Dynasty, Tubo Section*). Here Baihai refers to the two lakes in the area, Ngoring and Gyaring, and Heyuan refers to the Tuyuhun Kingdom established at the source of the river.

We continued our journey along the ancient road towards Heyuan. Our first stop was Nuanquan (Hot Spring) Postal Station. Although the station no longer existed, the hot spring was still gushing out hot water and steam. We then passed Huashi Gorge and came to Madoi, an important postal and ferry station on the ancient Tangbo Road. When Princess Wen Cheng arrived at the ferry station, however, there was neither bridge nor boat, thus hundreds of thousands of Tibetan youths stood in the water with boards on their shoulders to form a "human bridge" for her to cross.

During our visit to Ngoring Lake, we tried to find the place where King Songtsan Gambo had Baihai Palace built specially for their first meeting. This couple of two different nationalities spent their first night of married life together in this palace between the two lakes.

We then left the ancient road and moved westward to trace the source of the Yellow River. We learned that the Tibetans there call the two tributaries of the Yellow River "Red Bronze River" and "Wok for Frying Barley". We saw that the people at the source of the river are completely separated from the rest of the country, living a difficult but peaceful life.

Starting from Dafeichuan just outside of Gonghe, we covered 70 kilometres of the Tangbo Road and arrived at the Nuanquan (Hot Spring) Postal Station. Now simply called Wenquan (Hot Spring), it still serves its former function of providing food and lodging for passing travellers, and the hot spring for which it was named is still running after all this time. It is said that Princess Wen Cheng herself took a bath in the hot spring after her long journey.

We drove out of the town and saw the hot spring in the distance, from which steam was rising. As we came nearer to it we could just make out through the steam a shaved head floating above the water. A completely naked monk was sitting in the hot spring, having a bath! He smiled to us and invited us to join him in the spring, saying, "The water is hot and can cure many ailments especially skin diseases and arthritis. Tibetans often set up their tents on the lake shore to soak in the hot spring water." Hearing the monk's "advertisment", we all wanted to jump into the water to enjoy the hot spring like Princess Wen Cheng did in the past. Thinking of our long journey ahead, however, we only dipped our feet in the water and left with much regret.

Traces of Princess Wen Cheng

We drove west for another 70 kilometres and arrived at Huashi Gorge. Seeing the colourful stones in the vallley and on the mountains, we immediately realized why the gorge was called Huashi (Colourful Stones). Having a closer look, we realized that the colour of the stones was formed by different kinds of oxides which were washed out from the crevices in the rocks. The mountains along the river rise to 4,210 metres above sea level and are buffeted by strong winds all year round. No one dares stay overnight on the mountain, thus it is also known as the "Gate of Hell".

3

Travelling for 80 kilometres further to the southwest, we arrived at Madoi, the first city on the Yellow River. Madoi in Tibetan means the "Bank of the Yellow River", and used to be an important postal and ferry station on the ancient Tangbo Road. Now a concrete bridge spans the river, but in Princess Wen Cheng's day things were very different. It is said that there was neither bridge nor boat when Princess Wen Cheng got to the river. By the next morning, however, a colourful long bridge had miraculously appeared spanning the river, and Princess Wen Cheng was carried across in a sedan-chair. She was deeply moved by this "bridge", which was formed by Tibetan youths in festive dress who stood in the water with boards on their shoulders, calling out their greetings to her as she crossed.

4

Our car raced northwest for another three hours before we arrived at Ngoring Lake. The sky there was pure blue, the clouds dazzling white and the grassland a stretch of emerald green. The lake and sky were one colour, both a transparent blue. Fishing boats were moving on the lake while local carp were being dried on the shore – dried fish being a speciality of Qinghai. The fishermen working on a fish farm invited us to stay overnight, and then feasted us with dried fish. At sunset, the scene on the lake was truly wondrous. The sky looked like a huge steelmaking furnace, and from its mouth the golden "melted steel" poured out, breaking through the coloured clouds. It was already 10:00 p.m. Beijing time, but the sun here was just setting, reddening half of the sky.

At the same time the moon was rising like a huge millstone, looking much larger and brighter than it does inland. The stars were also extremely bright, twinkling in the sky. That night, while listening to the lapping of waves and the chirping of birds, I fell asleep dreaming of the ancient road.

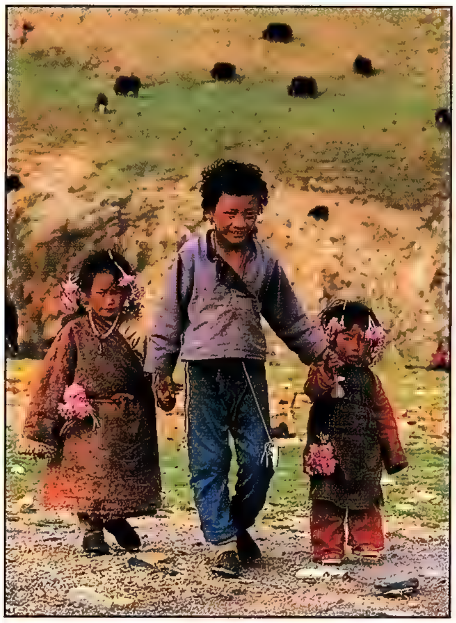
Like Qinghai Lake, there is also a Bird Island known as Haixin (Mid-Lake) Hill in the centre of this lake. By dawn the next day we were in a boat heading towards the island, which is home to many kinds of waterfowl like wild goose, wild duck, Meller's duck,

This stele indicating the source of the Yellow River is in the shape of a huge yak's head (1). ■ *Sunset at Bird Island (2)* ■ *This monk was happily bathing in a hot spring pool when we passed by (3).* ■ *Ngoring Lake is as blue as the South China Sea, and abounds in carp (4).* ■ *Both people and animals living at the source of the Yellow River learn to adapt to the bitter cold temperatures (5).*

the bar-headed goose, black-necked crane and pallas sea eagle. They live together harmoniously, forming a "united kingdom". All of a sudden, the birds flew off and a red sun rose up from the lake. The morning's rosy clouds, the birds' wings, the shadows of clouds and the waves were all fluttering between the sky and the lake, leaving us dizzy at the beauty of it all.

Between Ngoring and Gyaring lakes, there is a place called Garze Beach. A thousand years ago, King Songtsan Gambo came here from Lhasa to meet Princess Wen Cheng and built Baihai Palace on this spot. Li Daozong, on behalf of the Tang-dynasty emperor, performed the wedding ceremony for them, and the couple spent their honeymoon in Baihai Palace. The grassland is still here, but all that remains of the palace is the dagoba at Cuori Monastery and a two-storey green hall. When we arrived, Buddhist flags were strung on the structures, fluttering in the wind.

From the top of Bayan Langma Mountain, we had a bird's-eye view of the two lakes. In the east is the "blue long lake" – Ngoring Lake – which is shaped like a gourd, and in the west is the "white long lake – Gyaring Lake – which resembles a fish. The Yellow River links the two sister lakes together. Not far from the two lakes is a stele indicating the source of the Yellow River. The stele is in a unique shape, with its body shaped like a yak's head and its top like horns. Twenty kilometres further west is Xingxiu Lake, called Huahaizi by the Tibetans. Due to its low-lying flat land, the water from the Yellow River flows elsewhere when the river passes this area, forming ponds, lakes and swamps in its wake. In the sun the water glittered and reflected the blue sky, making the surface look like stars twinking in the night.



The Source of the Yellow River

A special envoy of the Yuan Dynasty named Du Shi once conducted a search for the source of the Yellow River, and mistakenly identified Xingxiu Lake as its source. In 1978, specialists went there to make a detailed survey and found that the Yellow River has two sources, one in the north and the other in the south, originating respectively from the Karqu River Valley and Yoigilangleb Basin at the foot of Gezegeya Mountain to the north of the Bayan Har Mountains. The two sources are at elevations of 4,600 metres and 4,800 metres, respectively.

The name of the Karqu River, the main source of the Yellow River, means "red bronze river" in Tibetan. On a gently sloping grassland at 4,830 metres above sea level, water gushes out from five springs and joins up to form a stream less than two metres wide. The stream flows northeast and, joined by many other springs, becomes the Karqu River. The water is crystal clear and flowers blossom along the banks. The river then passes through a 100-kilometre-long valley and merges with the Yoigilangleb River at the foot of the Bayan Har Mountains.

Yoigilangleb means "wok for frying barley" in Tibetan, so named due to its shape. It is an oval basin, 60 kilometres long and 40 kilometres wide. In summer the basin, covered with green grass and colourful wild flowers, is a perfect pastureland for Tibetan herdsmen. There are over 100 lakes in the basin, dotting it like the beautiful spots on the feathers of peacocks. A stream flows from a spring 30 kilometres to the southwest of Yagradagze Mountain and forms the Yoigilangleb River.

The Karqu and Yoigilangleb rivers have been nourishing the Yellow River for millions of years. The two tributaries meet at a place 16 kilometres to the west of Xingxiu Lake and become the trunk of the Yellow River, which is called the Marqu (Peacock) River by Tibetans. Some people say that this is because of the dotted ponds and lakes which look like the spots on a peacock's feathers, while others believe that there were peacocks living here long ago, when it was flat and had a warm climate, before the movements of the earth's crust formed mountains.

Life at the River's Source

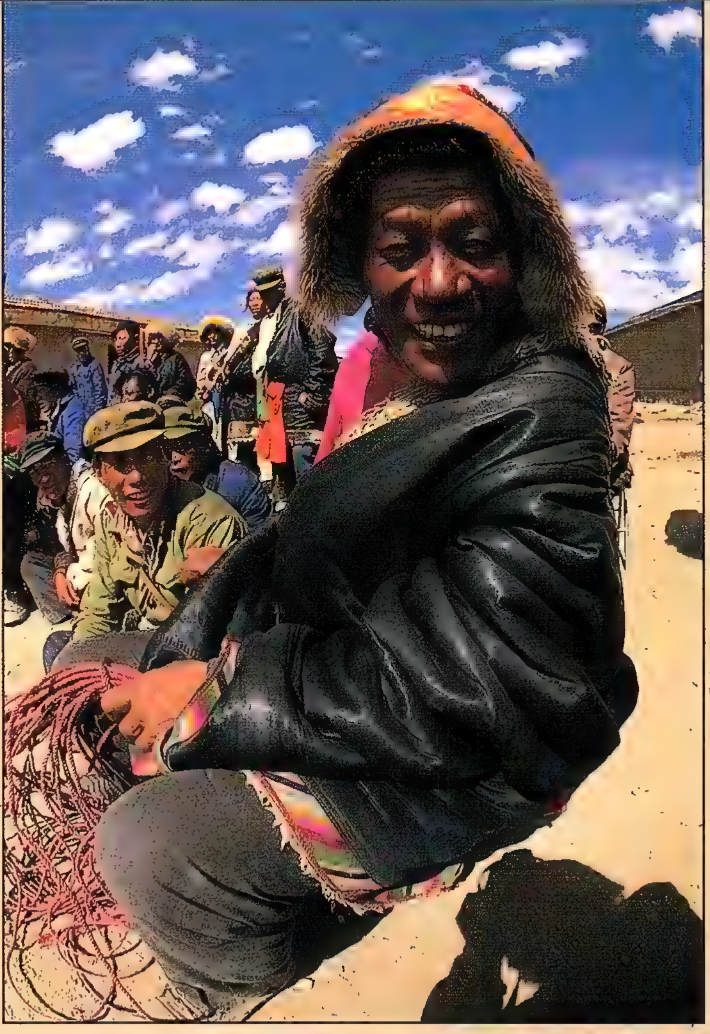
The Tibetan people living in the area of the two lakes and Madoi proudly call themselves "river-source people". They are honest and straightforward, hospitable, hard-working and strong. After birth, babies are kept in a sheep-skin pouch until they can crawl around on the ground. The saddle is their cradle, and as soon as they can walk they begin to learn horse-riding and archery. At seven or eight years old, they can herd cattle by themselves. Girls generally stay at home, taking care of their younger brothers and sisters, or helping their mothers milk yaks, make buttered tea or spin knitting wool.

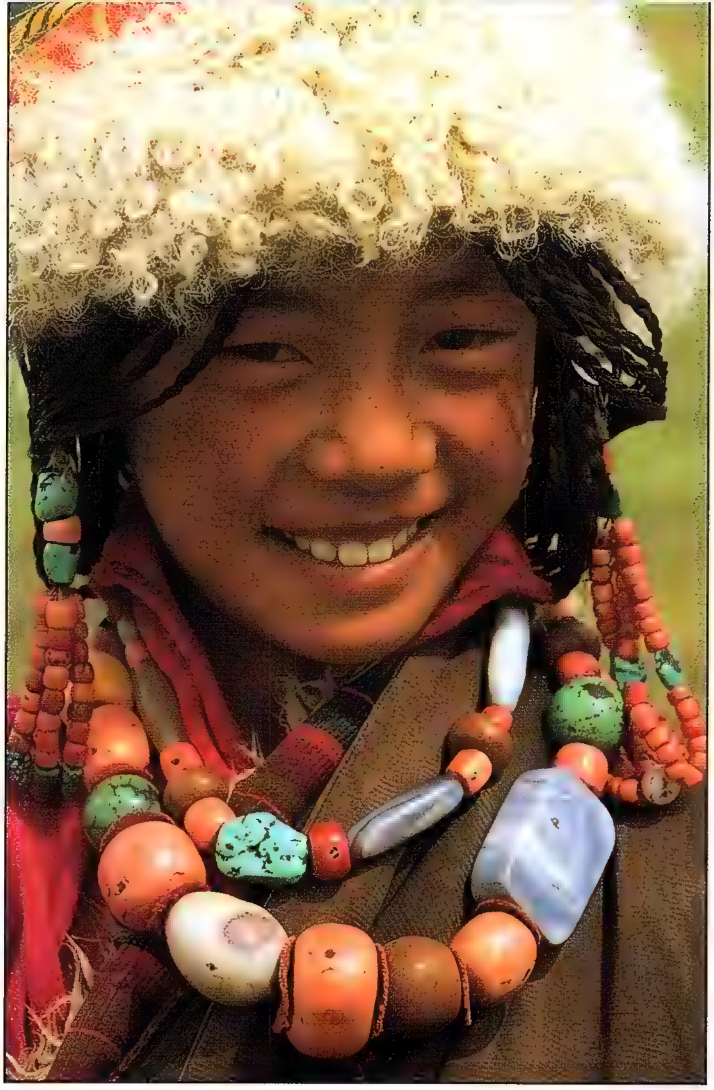
The Yellow River, the grassland, the mountains and their tents are the only world they know. Now a school for herdsmen's children has been set up by Ngoring Lake. The children do not have to pay any tuition fees and the school provides free meals and accommodation. These children, so familiar with riding and archery, now also play basketball or sing and dance to the accompaniment of religious instruments in their spare time.

Tibetan men and women, young and middle-aged, all wear their hair long here. The men also wear ornaments, jewelry and a red head cloth. The elements and the strong sun have darkened their skin and toughened their faces. Every summer, the herdsmen each take a small tent and drive their sheep and yaks into the Bayan Har Mountains, where they must live alone for months. Only when their herds become fat in late autumn do they return home.

Old people usually stay at home, spinning knitting wool, sun-drying yak dung for fuel and doing other light work. On clear days, they sit in the sun partaking of snuff or drinking wine, enjoying their leisure. They also go to the monasteries every day to listen to teachings, worship the

Small shrines are built wherever Tibetan people go (1). ■ *The harsh living conditions at the source of the Yellow River have made the people tough and highly adaptable (2).* ■ *Children here seem to fit right in with the natural environment (3).* ■ *Lamas wandering in the wilderness (4)*





Buddha or pray around the stone mani wall for peace for their children and the health of their herds. Most of the river-source people have never been to a county town or seen a film, and many have no idea at all of what a plane or train look like.

At this elevation – over 4,500 metres above sea level – the average annual temperature is below 5℃, the oxygen in the air is 50 per cent less than that inland, and water boils at 80℃. However, the river-source people, with incredible courage and endurance, not only survive on this piece of land but have also built their own town, schools, shops, dairy mills and gold mines.

Leaving Madoi, we continued to travel southwest and came to the foot of the Bayan Har Mountains, called Amanimu Zhanmusong by the Tibetans, which means "ancestor's mountain". A lake lies at the foot of the mountains, and various kinds of wild flowers were growing for dozens of miles around the lake. We found it hard to believe that this fertile place was situated at such a high altitude. We had all been to many well-known rivers and lakes, but had never seen such a wonderful scene, and certainly had not expected it here, along the supposedly desolate Tangbo Road.

Before we realized it, we found ourselves in the Bayan Har Mountains, which rise 5,000 metres above sea level. Of course, as we were already at a very high elevation, they did not look as lofty and majestic as we had imagined. They were fairly flat, like the hills along a sea coast, but were still very beautiful.

The scenery and climate here vary from mountain to mountain: It was sunny and flowers were blossoming everywhere on one mountain, but it was windy and snowing on another. I then believed what I had been told about the place by people who had been to Qinghai and Tibet

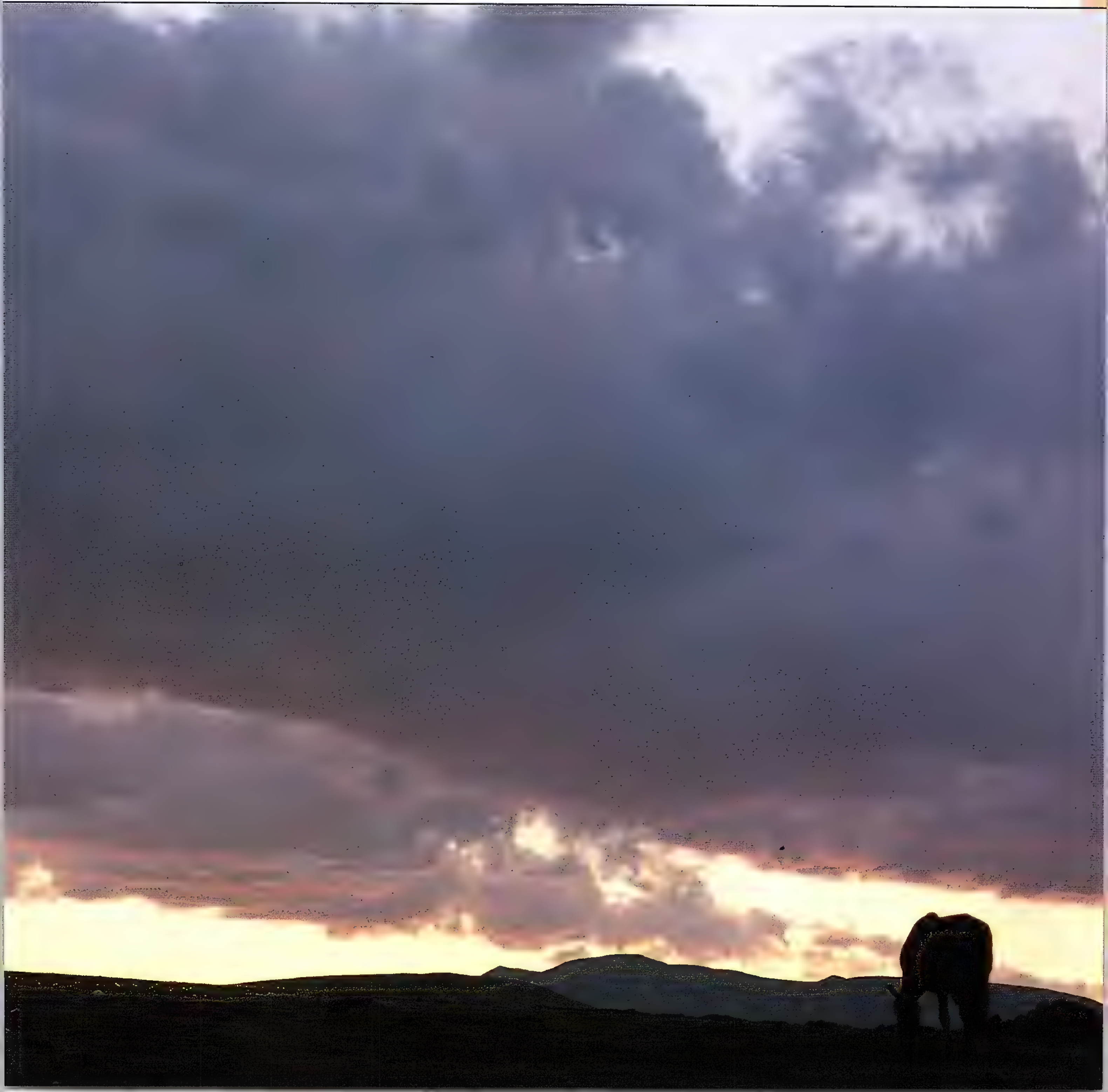
several times: "You can go through all four seasons in a single day." After crossing over another mountain ridge, the wind and snow suddenly stopped. The glow of sunset turned the sky, the mountains, the grassland and the highways into a landscape painting, some places darker, some places lighter. The scenes were changing so unbelievably quickly, it reminded me of something another person had told me: "The scenery never repeats itself on one's travels in Qinghai."

As we continued on our way, our guide pointed to a valley with a turbulent stream flowing through it, and told us that the valley was called Zuimatan (Drunken Horse Meadow). The thick grass in the valley was called Zuimacao (Drunken Horse Grass), and looked very fresh and tender. Horses love the grass here, but after eating it they become "drunk" and unable to move. In more serious cases, they lie down, lose consciousness and can even die, and this is why we did not see a single sheep or yak on this lush piece of grassland.

Translated by M.Q.

Previous pages, left and top right: *Portraits of the honest, warm-hearted people living at the source of the Yellow River.*
Previous page, bottom right: *The ancient Tangbo Road has long been lost in this vast wilderness, home now only to wild donkeys and Mongolian gazelles.*

Below: *The Tanggula Mountains are extremely high, but so is the land around them, so when you are there they actually look quite low.*



A Carnival on the Grasslands

Songtsan Gambo and Princess Wen Cheng spent their honeymoon in the seclusion and comfort of a quiet gully in Yushu. During their stay there the princess distributed seeds among the local Tibetans and taught them farming methods.

# of Yushu

After crossing the Yellow River, the ancient Tangbo Road extended southwest "for 230 kilometres to the Zhonglong Post, crossed the Xiyue River and continued until it reached the western border of the Duomi Kingdom. The road then cross-ed the Maoniu River over Tengqiao Bridge and reached Lieyi some 500 kilometres away. It went on past Shitang, Tubo Village, Jiezhi Bridge and the Jiezhi River until it reached Poyi Post another 220 kilometres away" (*The New Annals of the Tang Dynasty*).

The Zhonglong Post mentioned in the Tang annals refers to Qingshuihe, in what is today's Chindu County just near the border of Tibet. Lieyi is today's Gyairong, Xiyue refers to Zaqu, while Maoniu was the old name for the Tongtian River, which is actually the upper reaches of the Yangtse River. The route Princess Wen Cheng followed on her way to Tibet went from Chindu County to Jiegu Town and then west of Baitang, where it turned towards the Ziqu River, thus making a slight southern detour off the Tangbo Road followed by later travellers.

At a place not far from Jiegu Town we saw a temple built for Princess Wen Cheng. In nearby Yushu, the Tibetans had made a statue of Princess Wen Cheng and carved her footprints in stone, so that she would be remembered through the generations. The story of how the princess taught the local people to till the land and make wine during her stopover in Yushu is still on the lips of local people today.

On the grasslands of Yushu, we witnessed a carnival in which the local people, both religious and lay, paid homage to the holy cow and celebrated a bumper harvest. The singing and dancing lasted an entire day and night, and was still going on when we left.

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Leaving the Bayan Har Mountains behind, we crossed the Tongtian River and stopped at Jiegu Town, the seat of the Yushu Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture. Being surrounded by tall mountains and located at an altitude of more than 3,700 metres, Jiegu enjoys a pleasant climate characterized by cool summers and warm winters. Jiegu has a population of 20,000, with pleasant-looking streets nestled under the thick foliage of green trees. Residential houses are decorated with bright colours, and each courtyard is as well-manicured as a garden.

As an important trading hub for Xining, Kangding (in Sichuan) and Tibet, Jiegu is always crowded with merchants from Sichuan, Gansu, Shanxi, Shaanxi and Tibet. There are quite a few tourist attractions nearby as well. Longbao Lake to the southwest of the town is a nature reserve for black-necked cranes. The Temple of Princess Wen Cheng is on the western side of the town, and to the south the platform on which the celebrated monk Xuan Zang sunned his Buddhist scriptures sits right by the Tongtian River.

The people of Yushu, who are born singers and dancers, stand out from other Qinghai residents for their unique clothing. Young men like to wear hats edged with yak-wool, felt or otter fur to accompany their loose Tibetan robes, with a well-crafted knife dangling from a belt imbedded with precious stones. Those who are more fashion-conscious prefer to put on one-sleeved robes so as to show off the brand-new shirts they are wearing underneath. The girls like to wear their hair in a chignon, which they decorate

The Temple of Princess Wen Cheng was built in the gully where she honeymooned with her husband (1). ▨ *The Bayan Har Mountains are capped with snow all year round (2).*

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with red and green jewels. Being part of the modern world, they wear high-heeled shoes underneath their Tibetan robes, and walk with a graceful gait.

The Temple of Princess Wen Cheng

Leaving Jiegu, we drove along the Baitang River for several kilometres, crossed a bridge and then went in the opposite direction until we found our way to Beina Gully. There we saw a three-storey temple nestled against a cliff overgrown with towering pine trees and streaked with cascading waterfalls. This was the Temple of Princess Wen Cheng, where Tibetans often come to pay their respects.

Legend has it that after they got married, the princess and her husband, Songtsan Gambo, chose this gully as the site for their honeymoon because of its picture-perfect scenery and pleasant weather.

Inside, burning butter-oil lamps were set in a row on a long table. *Hatas* (silk scarves) contributed by worshippers hung from two huge silk streamers suspended from the beams. The front cliff wall is graced with nine Buddhist images carved in bas-relief. In the middle stands Sakyamuni, the Enlightened One, sitting on the backs of two snow lions. The Buddha is flanked by his eight Bodhisattva disciples – Samantabhadra, Manjusri, Vajrabodhi, Avalokitesvara, Maitreya, Ksitigarbha and two others.

The relief carvings were laid out according to the countours of the mountain in a very picturesque way. Beautifully crafted, the entire design was masterminded by Princess Wen Cheng and executed by craftsmen sent from Chang'an. Instructed by the princess, the craftsmen carved dozens of Buddhist images and pagodas on the walls of the gully. The cliff to the left bears an inscription of a 13-line text in Sanskrit and a 30-line text in stylized Tibetan – written by Thomi Sampotsan, the creator of the written form of the Tibetan language – as well as a 16-line verse written by Princess Wen Cheng herself in standard Chinese calligraphic style. However, much of the inscriptions are now illegible because of time and the elements, as well as the destruction wrought by people who chopped away the inscribed rock to use as medicine.

We were told that the Tibetans here loved the princess dearly and greeted

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This statue of Princess Wen Cheng has been transformed through the generations into a Goddess of Mercy lookalike (1). ■ *A mani stone being made in Leba Gully (2)* ■ *These footprints of Princess Wen Cheng's are still preserved in Yushu (3). The Tongtian River, which monk Xuan Zang crossed on his way to India (4)* ■ *Lovely Tibetan houses in Yushu (5)* ■ *People in Leba Gully say that this carving of the princess was done by one of the artisans in her entourage (6).* ■ *This god mask is probably meant to keep evil demons away (7).*

Following pages: *The Yushu Grassland is home to an unusual type of red grass (1).* ■ *A moment of leisure in the green embrace of nature (2) Lamas from nearby monasteries arrived by the truckload for the carnival on the grassland (3).* ■ *A monastic marching band played the prelude to kick off the festival (5).*

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her arrival with unprecedented pomp and pageantry, which is faithfully portrayed in colourful murals on the eastern and western walls of the temple. Some of the details of these murals are very impressive: The princess was so popular with the local people that even mountain gods volunteered to cut down the trees to make way for her, and the Dragon King came all the way to attend the welcoming ceremony.

Wherever she went the princess not only propagated Buddhism, but also asked the workmen who had come with her from Chang'an to help the Tibetans reclaim land and plant crops. She taught the local people how to use ploughs drawn by two buffalos and how to grow vegetables, grind flour and make wine. Because of her great contributions, the local people were reluctant to see her part when she left Yushu for Lhasa. They kept her camp site intact, made a statue, engraved her footprints in stone and, to show their best wishes for her according to the Tibetan tradition, spread butter oil and placed stones on these relics and plastered them with wool. Every day people would come to prostrate and ask for the princess' blessings.

In 710, Princess Jin Cheng became the second Tang-dynasty princess to be married to a Tibetan king, her husband being named Chide Zugdan. When her entourage passed through Beina Gully, she stopped to pay homage to Princess Wen Cheng's image. Later, she had this temple built to house Princess Wen Cheng's statue. In this way she preserved for ever this important piece of history.

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Gala Celebrations by the Tongtian River

The Tibetans call the Tongtian River "Zhiqu", meaning "the River of Milk". One of the tributaries of the upper reaches of the Yangtse River, the Tongtian River flows through the northeastern part of Yushu Prefecture and joins up with the Jinsha River in Chindu County.

Legend has it that in ancient times the Jade Emperor was angry when he discovered that pastoral Yushu was even more beautiful than his paradise in heaven. He summoned a holy cow and ordered it to turn Yushu into a barren land by eating up all its grass and tearing down all its mountains in three days' time. However, when the holy cow descended on the mundane world, he was enraptured by the picturesque landscape of Yushu. Moved by the hospitable Tibetans who treated him like a dear friend, he forgot about his task and started helping the local people. The Jade Emperor condemned him, but the cow countered by mounting one of the tall mountains and letting out three shouts, during which he spat out two springs of milk-like water. The springs turned into a river, and with the water the grassland turned even more beautiful. For this the holy cow was punished by the Jade Emperor and turned into a stone. The Tongtian River became the pride of the local people, as it supplied them with much needed water to irrigate their pasturelands.

Every summer the people of Yushu celebrate their harvests by singing and dancing and performing religious services in front of the stone which resembles the fabled holy cow. Of the various celebrations held at that time, the festival held in June by the Tongtian River in Chindu County is the largest. When we arrived at the festival we saw tents scattered all over the vast riverside fields. The largest one, which provided shelter to several hundred people, stood out like a chief commander's headquarters, while the smaller ones sheltered from two to several dozen people.

Truckloads of lamas and monks from nearby monasteries arrived to join in the merry-making. When the living Buddhas, lamas, local officials and celebrities all took their seats in front of the main tent, the smoke of burning mulberry tree branches started drifting up to the sky, the silence only broken by the tooting of trumpets and the beating of drums. Holding streamers and flags printed with prayers, maroon-clad lamas and monks made their way to the tents. Monks holding *vajra* (thunder bolt-shaped religious objects) and wearing colourful robes led the way, adding a solemn quality to the scene. According to Tibetan Buddhist tradition, lamas are not normally allowed to perform sorcerer's dances, but at the urging of those who preside over the ceremony, exceptions are often made.

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When the festival reached its climax, the participants danced a variety of dances. Warrior-dancers, wearing colourful waist-belts, wielded long swords while tripping and skipping in forceful movements, reliving war scenes from Tibet's history. Folk dancers staged a heel-and-toe performance to the accompaniment of blood-stirring songs, their long, floating sleeves making colourful arcs in the sky. The spectators were enthralled, oblivious of the passage of time – even sunrise and sunset, the appearance and disappearance of the moon could not budge them from their spots.

The festivities also included events such as large-scale horse races, bird-shooting and a display of horsemanship. The winners were mobbed as well-wishers vied with one another to drape red silk scarves on them and their horses; they became instant heroes and the most eligible bachelors in the eyes of young women. Thus for a few days the entire place was lost in revelry, with everyone present serving both as spectator and participant. For Tibetans, June is not just a month to harvest; it is also a time for great celebration.

Masquerading themselves as ferocious-looking demons, the performers presented a feverish rendition of a sorcerer's dance (1). ■ *Action-packed sword dancing (2)* ■ *Lamas make exceptions to the hard-and-fast monastic rules in order to participate in the local carnival (3).* ■ *A young monk wearing a ceremonial hat (4)* ■ *This man, dressed in the attire of a guardian deity, looks very much like an ancient commander-in-chief (5).*

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Previous pages: *During the carnival the vast expanse of lush grassland by the Tongtian River was strewn with large and small tents, which looked like white lotus flowers in the daytime and white lanterns at night.*

Day and night the merry-makers danced away the hours (1). A human garland formed by a group of young women in colourful costumes (2) Modern conveniences like motorcycles are no longer a rarity on the grassland (3). Each nomadic family taking part in the festival brings along a dozen or so yaks, which not only serve as draught animals but also supply family members with fresh milk every day (4). The carnival provides a rare opportunity for young women from remote mountainous areas to search for husbands (5).

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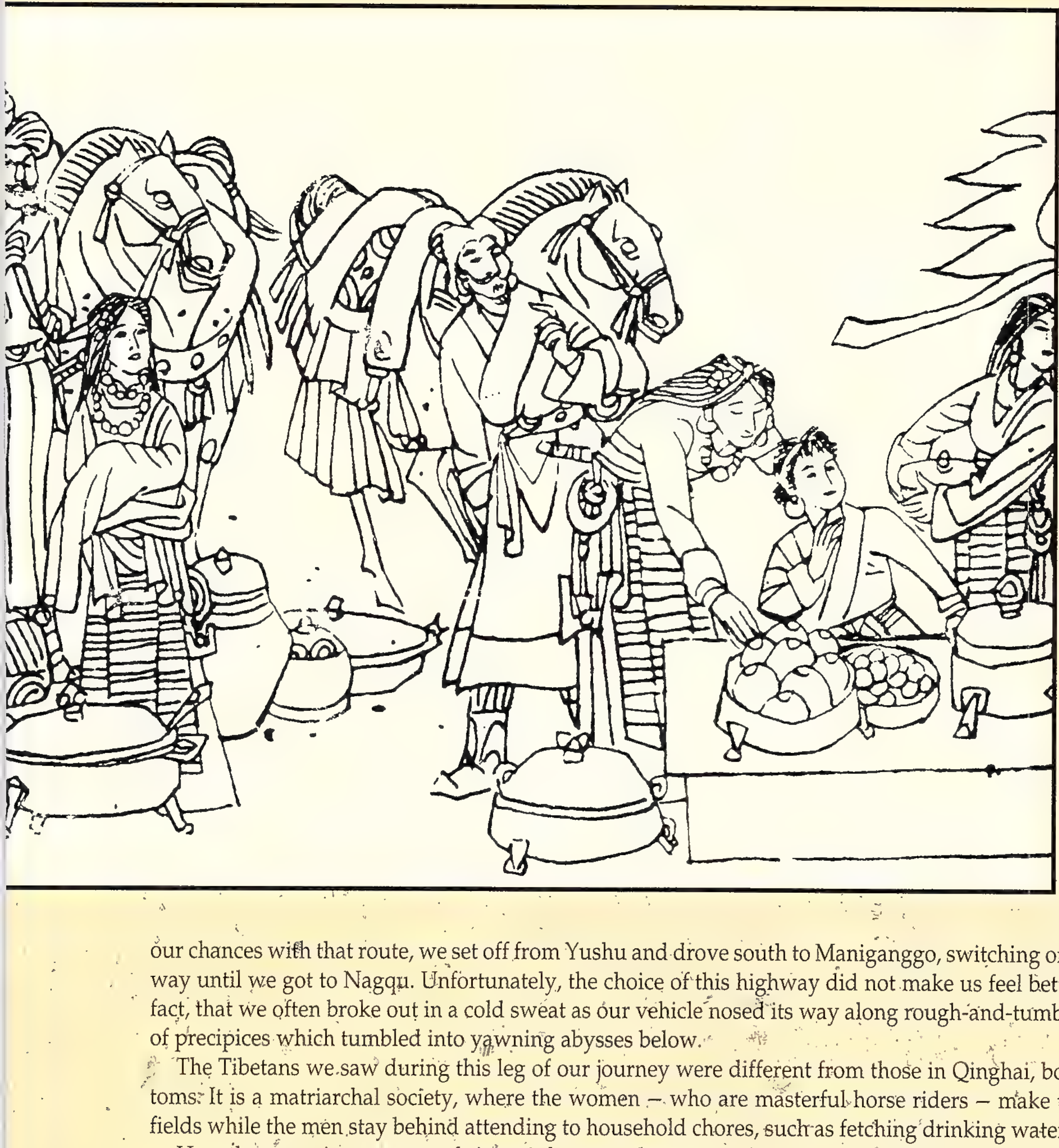
Wonders Along the Perilous

When news went out that Princess Wen Cheng was on her way to be married to the king, Tibetans flocked from afar to the Tangbo Road to see her.

Ya'an-Lhasa Highway



After leaving Yushu, we could have reached Nagqu in northern Tibet if we had continued to follow the Tangbo Road and crossed Chawola Pass in the Tanggula Mountains. This 700-kilometre-long section – now inaccessible to automobiles – of the ancient route passed through numerous marshes and across a myriad of turbulent rivers and high mountains. It was virtually a no-man's land, situated at more than 4,500 metres above sea level. Today, 1,000 years later, this section remains the most arduous and risky part of the entire ancient Tangbo Road.

Not wanting to take our chances with that route, we set off from Yushu and drove south to Maniganggo, switching onto the Ya'an-Lhasa Highway until we got to Nagqu. Unfortunately, the choice of this highway did not make us feel better. We were so scared, in fact, that we often broke out in a cold sweat as our vehicle nosed its way along rough-and-tumble roads cut into the edge of precipices which tumbled into yawning abysses below.

The Tibetans we saw during this leg of our journey were different from those in Qinghai, both in their attire and customs. It is a matriarchal society, where the women – who are masterful horse riders – make the rules and work in the fields while the men stay behind attending to household chores, such as fetching drinking water and raising the children.

Here the water in streams and rivers is harnessed to turn turbine prayer wheels day and night, in lieu of human hands. Often on the wild mountain slopes we saw heaps of painted mani stones, which the Tibetans believe are invested with special power and which pilgrims circumambulate as a sign of their faith and devotion. We were certainly not alone on our journey, for there was no lack of pilgrims. Carrying both bedding and food on their shoulders, they prostrated every foot of the way as they made for Lhasa, the sacred capital of Tibetan Buddhism.

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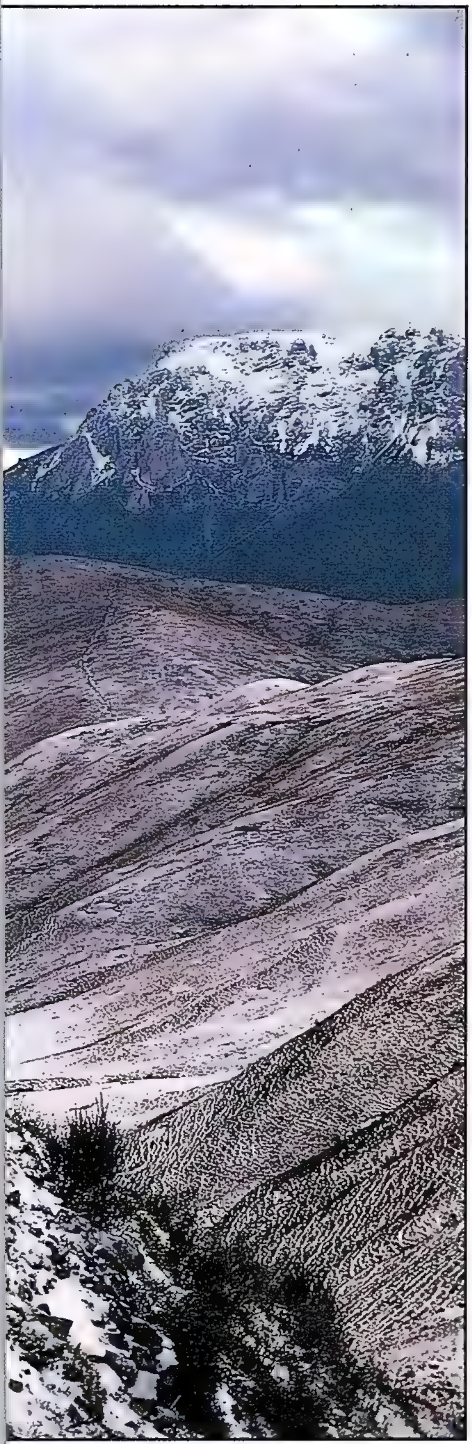
From Zadoi County in the Yushu Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture and across the Tongtian River, the ancient Tangbo Road climbs up the Tanggula Mountain Range at Chawola Pass and descends to the Northern Tibet Plateau. Then, running parallel to the southern section of the Xining-Lhasa Highway, it meanders its way through Nagqu and Yangbajain until it reaches its other end, Lhasa.

A good part of the 500-kilometre-long Zadoi-Nagqu stretch of the ancient road is carved out of the rocky faces of towering snow-clad mountains. It is so remote that human visitors are rare, and the road has been reduced to a narrow footpath inaccessible to automobiles. Since it takes more than a fortnight to cover its entire length travelling by foot and horseback – not to mention the unexpected difficulties along the way – we decided to travel south to Maniganggo, then switch to the Ya'an-Lhasa to reach our destination of Nagqu.

The two highways were worlds apart. The Yushu-Maniganggo section was so wide and smooth that even our driver could relax and enjoy the roadside landscape while driving. By contrast, everyone in our car was terrified as we travelled along the Ya'an-Lhasa Highway, which is full of hair-raising stretches of switchbacks winding up and down the southern side of the Tanggula Mountains – an erratic jumble of ravines and precipices. The road often hugged the edge of a perpendicular cliff, and as we drove we all concentrated on staring fixedly at the road, for the danger of tumbling down the deep ravine was imminent.



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Matriarchal Customs in Qinghai

In the Tibetan-inhabited areas of Qinghai, fetching water is the women's task, and a man can easily become the laughingstock of the town if he is seen ambling along bearing a huge wooden bucket on his back. But along the Ya'an-Lhasa Highway it is common to see men fetching water, perhaps because the harsh topography of the area is too much for women. The particular topography and climate of this region have given rise to a particular set of local customs.

In the mountain forests in northeast Tibet, women are known as good horseback riders, herdswomen and farmers. No less tough, hard-working and candid than their menfolk, they are excellent bread-winners for their families. Donning black Tibetan robes and red turbans, they often chat as the fine steeds they are riding on gallop ahead. (On the same road we were once amazed to see a goat bumping along bearing a smallish man on its back.)

We also noticed that the capricious weather in Tibet makes it necessary for the nomads to keep ample supplies of hay on hand at all times. If they didn't, their livestock would go hungry and perish whenever a hurricane, heavy rainfall or flooding caused by mountain torrents hit the region.

During a visit to a nomad's house, we were impressed by the local people's unique and scientific mutton-preserving methods. Inside a room as airy and cool as a cold storage, chunks of red meat were hanging on the walls and from the ceiling. We were told that meat preserved this way could be kept fresh and edible for several years.

A Deeply Religious People

Tibetans, especially the middle-aged and older ones, are in the habit of often reciting mantras or Buddhist scriptures. Whether sitting or walking, they are frequently seen spinning a prayer wheel and murmuring to themselves. To them life would be incomplete without their daily prayers.

Prayer wheels are usually small round objects covered in Buddhist scriptures. When they are turned, it is said that each revolution of the wheel is the same as reciting those scriptures aloud. But travelling on the Ya'an-Lhasa Highway we saw an unusual version of this: large prayer wheels balanced on wooden frames and placed astride a gurgling spring, spinning day and night as the running water pushed the pedals fixed underneath the frame. According to the local people, each spin of a prayer wheel accomplishes the equivalent of its owner finishing one

The landscape in the upper reaches of the Lancang River is one of a kind (1). ■ *On the Ya'an-Lhasa Highway, automobiles have to cling to the mountain cliffs lest they tumble over the edge and into the deep ravine below (2).* ■ *A trip along the Ya'an-Lhasa Highway is perilous for any kind of vehicle, even jeeps (3).* ■ *The goat is an excellent means of transportation, or so it seems to this youngster (4).*

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prayer session to ask for blessings for humans and animals, a safe journey for wayfaring family members and friends, and to keep away diseases and misfortune. The unending turning of the prayer wheels is symbolic of the Tibetans' undying devotion to the Buddha.

Along the way we stopped to visit a small temple. There we saw lots of newly-made *chazas* (clay sculptures of the Buddha) and *tangka* paintings. But what struck us most was the 11-faced statue of Guanyin (the Goddess of Mercy) housed in the temple, which was done in a combination of Hindu, Tang- and Song-dynasty art styles. The expressions of the 11 faces varied from gentle and benevolent to frightening. The body of the statue had one hand placed on her chest, and the face above it wore a stern expression, as if she were trying to persuade people to own up to their misdeeds. The crown the goddess wore was decorated with layer upon layer of lotus flower petals, and her ears, in the shape of Dharma Wheels, were hollowed out with the most exquisite engraving technique; they were among the finest objects of Buddhist art we saw during our trip.

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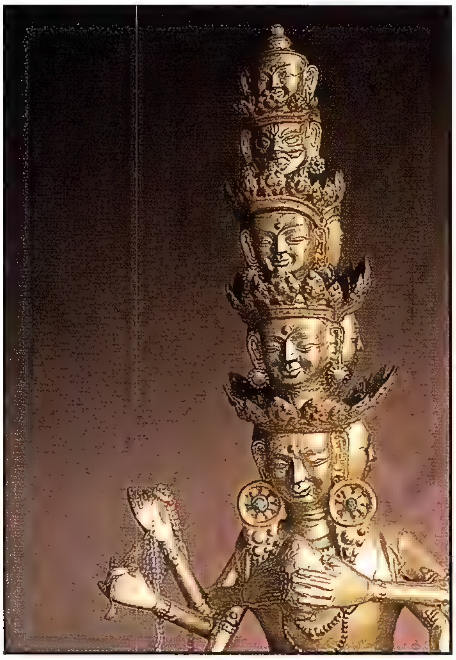
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As we drove along the highway, we passed many piles of mani stones and walls inscribed with Buddhist sutras at mountain passes and crossroads. Seen from a distance, the mani stone piles looked like stalls selling a wide variety of fruit. Each mani stone is painted brightly and inscribed with the six-syllable Tibetan mantra: om-mani-padme-hum. They can be as large as old-fashioned Chinese pillows or as small as chicken eggs.

The Tibetans regard contributing their share of stones to the mani stone piles as an act of merit. During festivals and religious occasions, thousands turn out to circumambulate the mani stone piles, trying to walk and prostrate around them as many times as they can. Those travelling away from home make it a point to walk past a mani stone pile, if there is one on the way, on its northern side, and when they return they must walk past it on its southern side – each time they do so, it is like they have finished reciting a complete scripture. It is said walking around a mani stone pile helps elderly people find their way to a Pure Land when they die, helps those who are sick get cured, and purifies one's past negative actions.

The greatest dream of a Tibetan Buddhist is to pay a pilgrimage to a Buddhist holy place. If one can only make one such pilgrimage in a lifetime, their fondest wish is to pay a visit to the Potala Place in Lhasa and pay homage to the Living Buddhas there, as this means that one has paved a road to a Pure Land for one's next life. That is why on our journey we saw so many men and women prostrating their way in the direction of Lhasa, their food and bedding carried on their backs.

Their unique way of showing their utter devotion to the Enlightened One is to prostrate themselves flat on the ground, as if measuring every step of the way. They will lie prostrate and pray for what seems an eternity whenever they come across a temple, a pagoda, a sutra wall or any other religious landmark. The pilgrimage may last several hundred or even a thousand kilometres, but they persist most tenaciously, prostrating every foot of it, until, unkempt and in rags, they reach their destination. For the single purpose of getting to the Potala they are ready to give up whatever they own, even lose their lives.

Translated by Ling Yuan

Previous pages: *A huge pile of painted mani stones sits alongside the highway.*

Farm plots add a tiny touch of green to this otherwise dreary-looking canyon (1). ■ *Tibetan women seem to be more sturdy and hard-working than men in this part of Tibet (2).* ■ *This prayer wheel spins endlessly, propelled by spring water (3).* ■ *Living conditions along the Ya'an-Lhasa Highway are harsh (4).* ■ *Every day we saw pious Tibetan Buddhists, men and women, prostrating their way to Lhasa (5).* ■ *The 11 faces of this Goddess of Mercy statue all bear a different expression (6).*

CHAPTER EIGHT

The Snow-Covered Qiang

Accompanied by the Tibetan king Songtsan Gambo, Princess Wen Cheng crossed the desolate Tanggula Mountains, went through the Qiangtang Plateau and finally arrived at the Hechuan Courier Station (present-day Nagqu) – the entryway to northern Tibet.

ng Area

At long last we arrived at the Qiangtang Plateau in the north of Tibet, where we began this leg of our journey. There is no summer here to speak of but rather a short spring, short autumn and a very long winter. Even in the so-called summer it often snows heavily.

Some say that this is the hardest place on earth for people to live. We stayed for only 10 or so days, but in that short time experienced first-hand what hardship meant.

In this harsh climate, the only animals raised are northern Tibetan sheep and yaks, who can withstand the cold and low atmospheric pressure. The sturdy yaks also serve as guards for flocks of sheep, who are in constant danger of being attacked by wolves.

In summer on the vast grassland there is not a soul in sight except for shepherds and their many sheep and yaks; nor are there any sounds but those of the shepherds' songs and shouts to relieve the long and lonely days. The shepherds' only companions are their flocks, thus the appearance of even the smallest bird is enough to bring joy to their faces.

In this snow-bound area we came upon a group of people engaged in another, very different, occupation – the workers who maintain the Qinghai-Tibet Highway. Facing the elements and harsh conditions together every day, they have forged ties based on duty and teamwork. When we finally arrived at Nagqu after our long travels in this desolate land, its bustling streets were indeed a sight for sore eyes.

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Travelling west along the Ya'an-Lhasa Highway, we came to northern Tibet, popularly known as the Qiangtang Plateau. Compared to the last part of our journey, here the mountains were higher, the climate more severe and living conditions even more difficult. Since ancient times the Qiangtang has been a pristine pastureland, and for generations the people there have survived by raising sheep and other flocks.

At first glance herding sheep seemed an easy task, but when we talked to the shepherds and took over their whips to try our hand at it, experience showed us that a certain skill was definitely required. No matter what we did the sheep would not move. When they saw grass they stopped to graze; when they spied water they stopped for a drink. Even though I shouted till my voice was hoarse and ran about till I was covered in sweat, they remained mingled in a chaotic mess. And yet as soon as the herdsman waved his whip and whistled, the sheep immediately moved into an orderly procession and then went towards a prefixed destination on the mountain.

Taking care of sheep is actually quite complex, and a good herdsman must also be a good weatherman, as the weather in northern Tibet is so unpredictable. For example, one day I watched a herdsman quickly herd his sheep to a leeward facing slope, even though the sky was clear and blue. Suddenly, and to my great surprise, black clouds gathered in the sky and a windstorm swept up, blowing biting sand into our faces. It was at that moment that I finally appreciated the herdsman's ability to predict the weather. If he had not been as foresighted, certainly many sheep would have gone astray and got hurt in the windstorm.

At dusk the herdsman drove the sheep back to the open space in front of his tent and counted the nearly one thousand sheep in just a few minutes. He got the sheep in a group, then encircled them with a yak-hair rope attached to wooden pegs stuck in the ground. Soon the yaks returned and he tied them to the wooden pegs along the rope, thus finishing his job of rounding up the herds.

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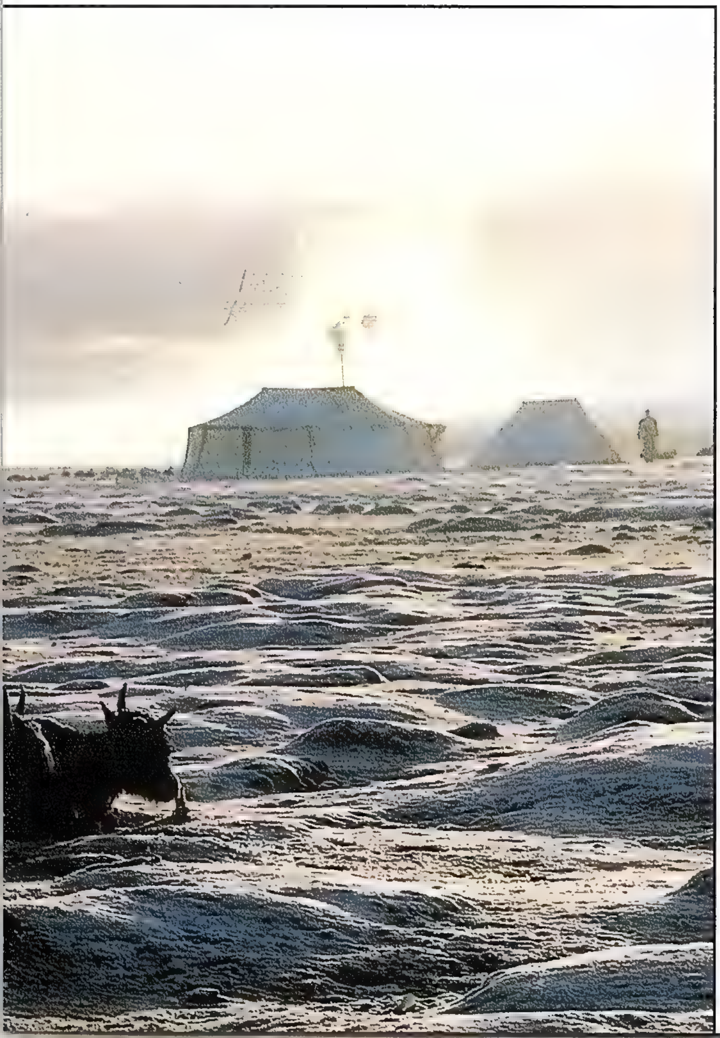
Wolves are very common in this area, and especially when it snows or is windy, they follow herds of sheep wherever they go. At night, taking advantage of the darkness and the fact that both man and beast are asleep, they sneak up and try to steal away sheep. The yaks, however, positioned as they are around the circle of sheep, make excellent guardians. As soon as they see a wolf they rear up and prepare to attack. If the wolves do not go away, they give a loud roar, break their ropes and rush at the wolves with their horns. No matter where the wolves run to, the yaks do not give up the pursuit until the wolves are horned to death or jump down a cliff. After a battle, the exhausted yaks lie down on a slope, their bellies swollen. The herdsman then runs over to them and massages their bellies to release the air blocked inside. By the next day, the yaks are back to normal, chomping on grass and carrying loads.

It is the women here on the pastureland that do all the work of milking, cooking tea and drying yak dung. Even in summer the temperatures often reach below zero, thus when milking one's hands easily get frozen and chapped. Although milking looks easy, it is in fact a difficult chore. Squatting on the ground and milking dozens of cows is very tiring and painful on the back. When it rains, the milker gets wet all over and when it snows she becomes a human snow figure.

One night on the plateau we slept in a herdsman's tent. The Tibetan tent is not as tightly and heavily covered as its Mongolian counterpart, hence the wind comes in from every direction. Although the hospitable hostess had prepared fur bedding for us and covered us with a fur overcoat, we still felt very cold and could not get to sleep. When we got up in the morning, the quilt made a crackling noise, as it was covered with a thin layer of ice formed from the moisture of our breath. One night was plenty for us to understand the hardships of a herdsman's life. To them, of course, this was all perfectly normal. The next day, our host was back out there weilding his whip and herding his sheep and yak in the deep snow.

In summer, grazing pastures are located on mountains 4,000 or 5,000 metres above sea level. Only in autumn do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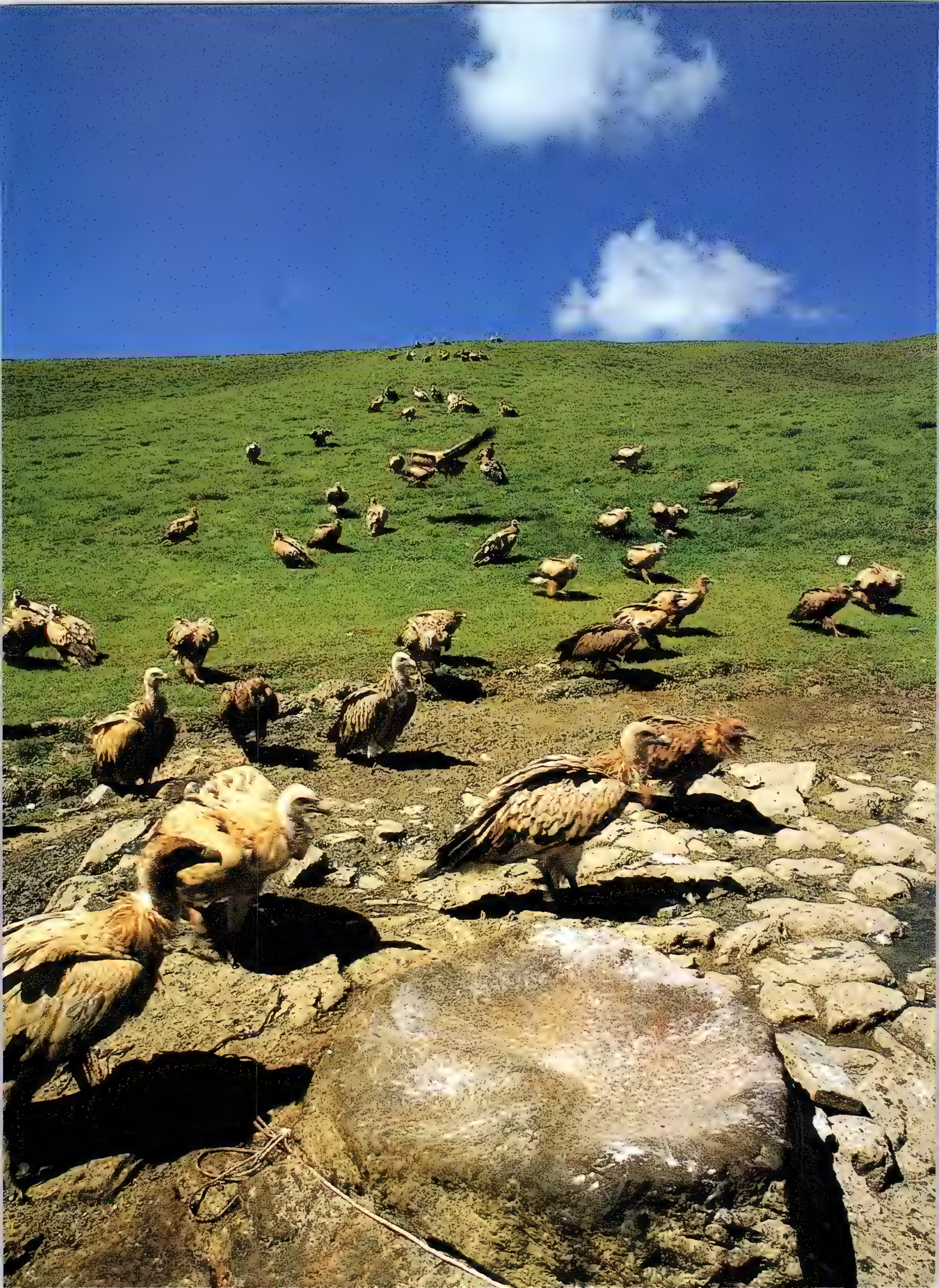
The Qinghai-Tibet Highway passes through the snow-covered Qiangtang Plateau (1). ■ *Only yaks and Tibetan sheep can be raised in these high altitudes. The yaks serve as guardians of the sheep and often fight with wild wolves, who try to attack the sheep at night (2).* ■ *The only fuel used here is dried yak dung (3).* ■ *Even in cold and snowy weather, these people do not wear many clothes, but can still stand temperatures of -20°C (4).* ■ *Tibetan herdsmen spend the winters in yak fur tents (5).* ■ *The people living on the Qiangtang Plateau can survive the severe cold, low atmospheric pressure and lack of oxygen, but it is more difficult to endure the loneliness of herding sheep for months with no other human company (6).*

Following pages: *On the Qiangtang Plateau there is no summer, only a short spring and autumn and a long, long winter.*



the herdsmen graze their herds in flat valleys, which are their communal "headquarters". The tough and adaptable herdsmen on the Qiangtang Plateau can tolerate the icy-cold winters, high altitudes and lack of oxygen; what are most difficult to bear are the loneliness and monotony of a herdsman's life. They live virtually alone in vast mountainous areas with only their sheep and yaks to keep them company. With no one to talk to, after a few months they can bear it no longer and start to sing and shout to the sky. Time moves slowly like a frozen river. At that point the mere sight of a bird or other creature can greatly lift a man's spirits. When summer is over, the sheep are fatter but he is thinner. When autumn sets in, he returns to the pastureland and spends autumn and winter with his family.

By the time we arrived in the busy town of Nagqu, leaving the wild Ya'an-Lhasa Highway far behind, everything seemed new and the simple two-storey buildings and small restaurants appeared abundantly attractive. The whole town was full of wonder for us, and when we saw Tibetans buying and selling sheep, we felt a sort of kinship for them.

Located along the Nujiang River and sandwiched between the Tanggula and Nyainqêntanglha mountains, Nagqu is the seat of Tibet's Nagqu Prefecture and has been inhabited since the Neolithic Age. In ancient times, this place functioned as a transport hub linking snowbound Tibet with central China. During the Tang Dynasty, Nagqu was the political centre of the State of Gan and a vassal state of the Tubo Kingdom, as well as being the administrative base for the King of Gan. Nearby was the Hechuan Courier Station, used by the couriers and envoys of both the Tubo Kingdom and the Tang Dynasty. Princess Wen Cheng most certainly would have stayed in Nagqu on her way to Tibet. The importance of Nagqu is underscored by the fact that it is home to Xiaodeng Monastery, the largest temple in northern Tibet. Nagqu is also now the place where the Qinghai-Tibet Highway and the Ya'an-Lhasa Highway converge.

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It was thus in Nagqu that we began our southward journey along the Qinghai-Tibet Highway. In elevation, this is the highest highway in the world. It starts in Xining in Qinghai Province, passes through Xishi Gorge, climbs over Riyue (Sun and Moon) Mountain, passes around Qinghai Lake, over the Qaidam Basin, through Golmud, over the Kunlun and Tanggula mountains, through Nagqu and Yangbajain, then finally arrives at Lhasa. Open every season of the year, the highway is one of the country's thoroughfares that is up to international standards.

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Along this highway on the roof of the world there are more than 100 maintainance teams, among which many are husband-and-wife, father-and-son or sister teams. This is perhaps because, in such difficult and desolate working conditions, only family ties are strong enough to keep people at their post. Along the way we often saw young couples paving with cobblestones or pouring asphalt on the road surface, while their kids sat in carrying-baskets by the roadside. These people start being maintainance workers at the age of 17 or 18 and then spend all their lives on the road. When their children grow up, they in turn take over their parents' spades and paving tools and continue the occupation of the older generation. The strong ultraviolet rays sunburn them all over, and the wind and frost cut deep lines in their faces.

They are helpful and friendly people, coming to the aid of anyone in trouble. If a truck should break down in the dark of night or on a windy, snowy day, they bring meals and water to the driver and often even help to push the vehicle. Or if a passenger should fall ill on the road, they bring medicine and oxygen to them and try to get them to a hospital in a town lower in elevation. In this part of the world, everyone must depend on others to survive.

Translated by Gu Weizhou

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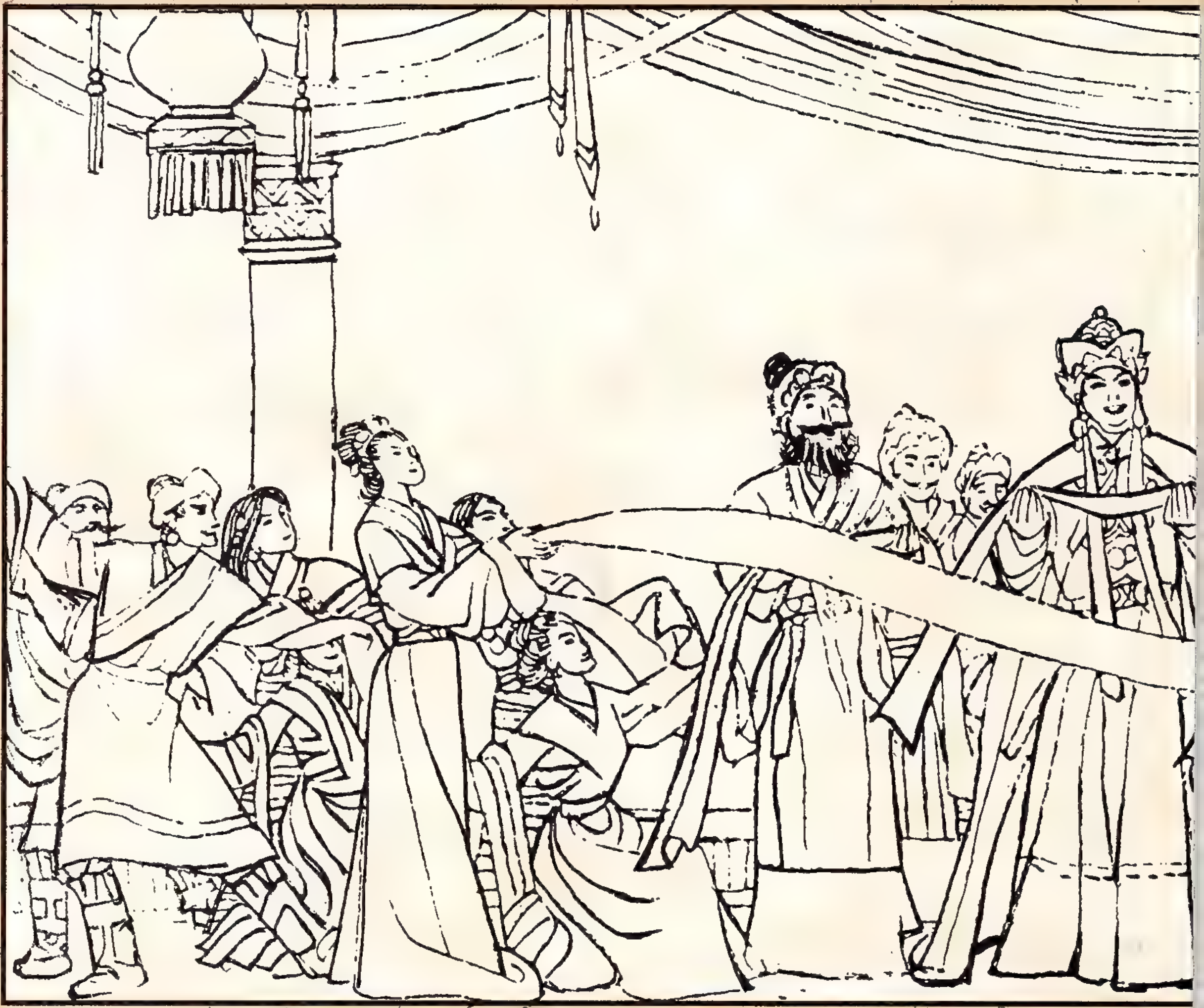
There are many Celestial Burial Grounds on the Qiangtang Plateau, where Tibetans go to dispose of their dead (1, by Yang Yankang). ■ *The setting sun brilliantly colours the sky over the plateau (2).* ■ *Arriving in Nagqu after so long on the plateau, we felt we were in a busy and prosperous "metropolis" (3).* ■ *The herdsmen move about all year round (4, by Yang Yankang).* ■ *The hot springs in Yangbajain (5)*

Arriving at Lhasa: Princess W



Travelling overland for more than 3,000 kilometres, Princess Wen Cheng went through untold difficulties and hardships before she finally arrived in Lhasa, her new home. A grand ceremony in her honour was held in the palace of the Tibetan king.

n Cheng's Final Destination

From Nagqu to Lhasa is the final section of the ancient Tangbo Road. Historical documents and recent explorations both prove that the ancient road and the present Qinghai-Tibet Highway took more or less the same route. Ancient literature, for instance, recorded that "There are hot springs that shoot up about ten metres in the air. The steam rises like a cloud, and the water is hot enough to boil rice". The hot springs that have been recently developed at Yangbajain are no less spectacular than those in the historical records, and the steam they emit does indeed rise up many metres.

In Lhasa, the final destination of the ancient Tangbo Road, we saw one of the world's rarest and most magnificent buildings – the Potala Palace. According to one legend, it was constructed as a result of a suggestion made by Princess Wen Cheng to the king, after she had made geomancy observations of Lhasa. In the corridors of the Potala Palace there is a series of murals which depicts the princess' experiences in coming to Tibet.

In Lhasa's Jokhang Temple – a structure with certain Tang-dynasty features – one can see statues of Songtsan Gambo, Princess Wen Cheng, Gar Tongtsan and other nobles. For generations Tibetans have been coming here to worship, pasting so much gold foil onto the faces of the statues that they are now covered with gold wrinkles.

The Summer Palace (Norbu Lingka) of the Fifth Dalai Lama has been turned into a park, where visitors can spend their leisure time and have picnics. Here a mural devoted to the theme of how Trisong Detsan recognized his mother tells an interesting story about Princess Jin Cheng.

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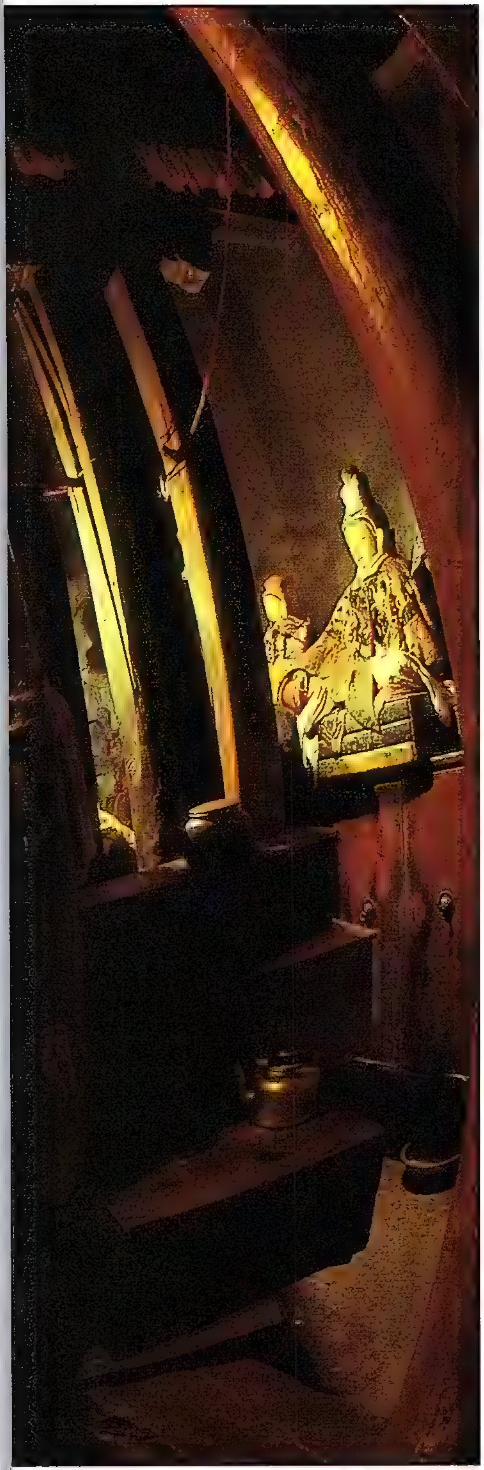
Leaving Nagqu and travelling southwest along the Qinghai-Tibet Highway, we bid farewell to the northern Tibetan highland and arrived at Yangbajain, an area half devoted to agriculture and half to animal husbandry. Soon after we turned west into a small valley, an almost magical landscape greeted us: on the velvet grassland under the snow-capped Nyainqêntanglha Mountains, white steam was rising up like mushroom clouds towards the blue sky. In the sunlight, the steam changed its dazzling colours as if creating a masterpiece of natural beauty. The Yangbajain Hot Springs cover an area of 7,000 square metres and the water varies in temperature from 50° to 90°C. The water deep underground is even hotter: more than 10°C above the boiling point. The steam that had cooled at the springs' mouth presented a beautiful display of various forms.



In addition to the springs, there are also wells here that send out vapour instead of hot water. The vapour had made the rocks by the wells so hot that I had to jump up only a moment after sitting on one of them. I was told that the hot air current underground was 300-400°C. People at the Hot Spring Development Centre told us that in 1977 the place experienced a "hot water explosion", when water burst up amidst black smoke after creating a thunderous sound, carrying mud and rocks a hundred metres up in the air. After that explosion, a pond of hot water formed on the spot.

In October of that year, the first hot air thermal power station on the plateau was built at Yangbajain, the first time the country has made use of this kind of energy. When night fell, we found that hundreds of "milky ways" appeared on the slopes of the Nyainqêntanglha Mountains, creating a scene in Tibetan mythology known as "magic lamps".

More than 80 kilometres south of Yangbajain, we entered the Lhasa River Valley, where green fields stretched into the distance along both banks. It was hard to believe that a place so full of life could be situated at 3,000 metres above sea level. It is said that after she came to Tibet, Princess Wen Cheng learned that there was a grain shortage, so she took out some seeds she had brought with her and taught the Tibetans how to plant them. It was very easy for corn, potatoes, broad beans and rape plants to take root and flourish on the plateau. Wheat, however, did not adapt well to the climate and was gradually replaced by *qingke* barley, which was much more to the taste of the Tibetans.

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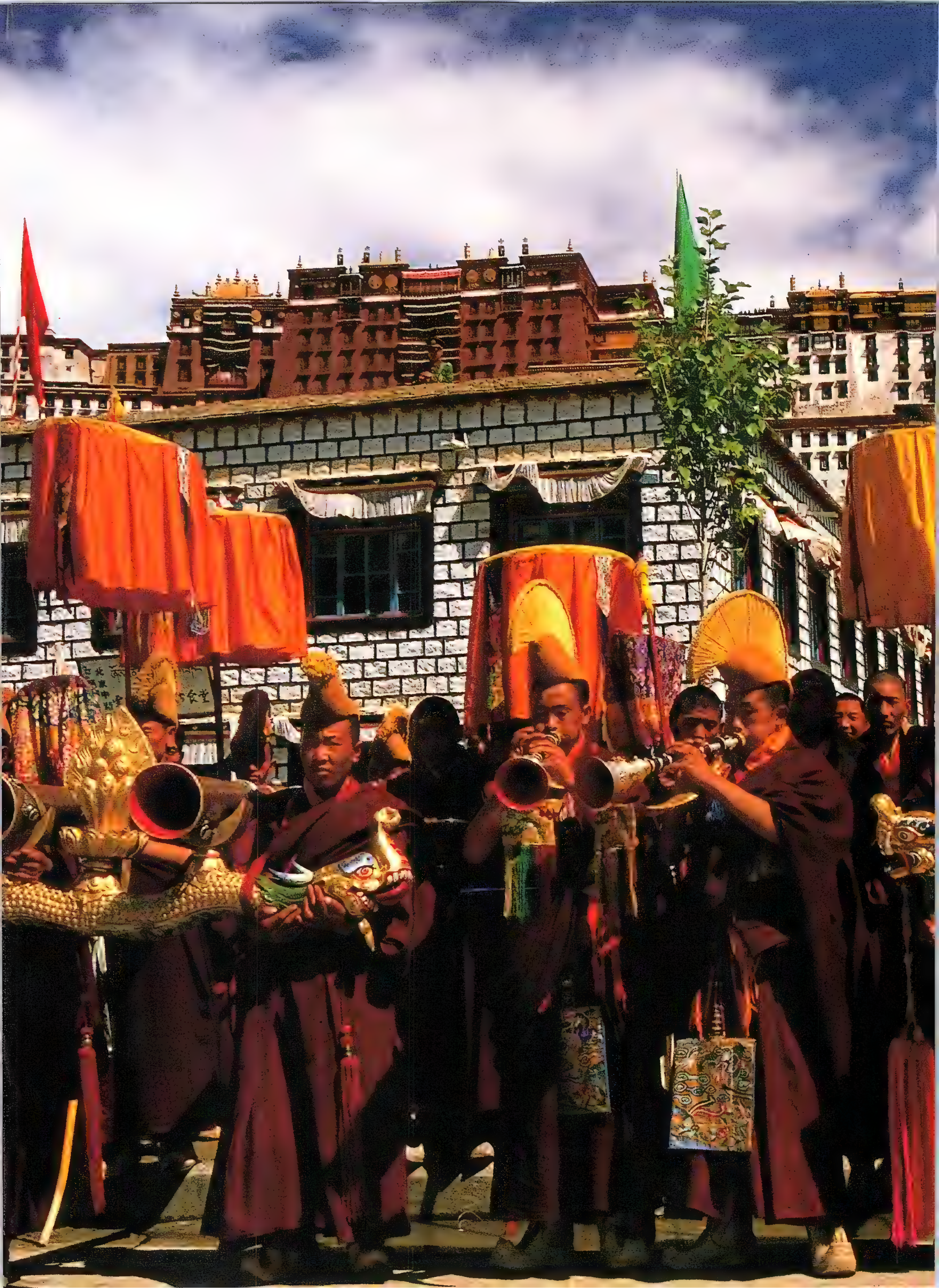
Lhasa – the Old and the New

Strolling in the old section of the city of Lhasa, we felt strongly the influence and impact of religion. Especially at the centre of the old city at Bagor, the street that goes round the Jokhang Temple, we realized we were without a doubt in the heart of a Buddhist kingdom. The Tibetan-style stone houses along the street and the slow-moving horse-driven carts rolling on the pebbled road seemed to bring us back to the Middle Ages. Devoted disciples were turning prayer wheels, circumambulating the temple and doing prostrations as incense smoke curled up and Buddhist instruments clanged. All this added to the atmosphere of religious solemnity. Lhasa is truly worthy of the position it holds as a sacred place in the hearts of Tibetans.

The new section of Lhasa is centred round the Cultural Palace, from where several wide streets extend towards the northwest of the city. This area is certainly different from the old section. The Lhasa Hotel, the Telecommunications Tower, the TV Education Build-

A view of the Potala Palace taken from the hill behind it (1) ■ Statues of Songtsan Gambo's son (2) and Gar Tongtsan (3) ■ In the main hall of the Jokhang Temple is the gilded statue of the Buddha brought by Princess Wen Cheng from Chang'an, along with statues of several Tibetan kings and princesses (4). ■ Statues of Songtsan Gambo (5) and Princess Wen Cheng (6)



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ing and the News Centre rise abruptly from the ground, giving the "City of Sunshine" (the sun shines 306 days a year over Lhasa) a new look. Department stores and trading markets were well stocked with consumer goods from all over the country, and the gymnasium, the Children's Activity Centre, karaoke bars and dance halls further added to the air of modernity.

We drifted along with the crowd up the hill to the Potala, which offers a bird's-eye view of the whole city. The city is embraced by snow-capped hills, and the Lhasa River cuts through the southern district. The Lhasa Bridge ties together the old and new sections, and the 13-kilometre-long Binhe Road, lined by trees on both sides, looks like a green jade necklace that decorates the city. It is said that when Princess Wen Cheng first arrived in Lhasa, she came up this hill to have a view of the terrain. In her eyes, an image of an evil woman appeared before her, which made it look like Potala Hill and Yaowang (God of Medicine) Hill were the breasts of the evil woman, and therefore must be suppressed.

She thus suggested to Songtsan Gambo that a palace be built on Potala Hill and fortresses be constructed on Yaowang Hill. In retrospect, it can be inferred that the princess not only knew about *yin* and *yang* and the five vital elements of nature, but also understood military affairs. The palaces and fortresses, after they were built, not only added magnificence to the hills but also held invading enemies at bay. Since then the city began to grow around the Potala Palace to finally become what it is today.

4

The Magnificent Potala Palace

The term "potala" comes originally from Sanskrit, and means "a boat that carries one away from the bitter sea of suffering". Built against the southern slope of Potala Hill, the imposing 13-storey building is more than 110 metres high, about 500 metres from east to west and 100 metres from north to south. First built during the rule of Songtsan Gambo, it was later damaged by fire and war. In 1645 the Fifth Dalai Lama, Lobsang Gyatso, decided to have it rebuilt. He personally composed a poem singing the praises of the magnificent structure, comparing it to a heavenly palace and saying that its bright golden roof even scared the sun.

Staircases laid with granite stones lead to the palace gate, whose bolt is made with the trunk of a single tree. Inside the gate there is a terrace which used to serve as the place where the Dalai Lamas held ritual dances. In the past, only officials of the top four ranks were admitted here.

More staircases lead to an antechamber, on whose wall is a hand print left by the Fifth Dalai Lama during construction of the palace. The other side of the wall features murals of historical topics, including the hardships Princess Wen Cheng and her companions went through when coming to Tibet and the welcome she received upon arriving in Lhasa. Apart from their historical value, these paintings reflect meticulous composition and technique.

After going through the antechamber, one comes to the old site of the palace of the Tibetan king, behind which is the room where Songtsan Gambo used to meditate. The palace here is more like a cave with dim lighting. The four walls feature coloured statues of Songtsan Gambo, Princess Wen Cheng, Princess Bhrihuti Devi and Gar Tongtsan.

Inside the Red Palace higher up there are meditation halls and eight stupas housing the remains of the Dalai Lamas. All of different sizes, the two largest ones belong to the Fifth and Thirteenth Dalai Lamas. The one for the Fifth Dalai Lama was constructed in 1690 and is gilded with about 300 kilograms of gold and inlaid with jewels. This dazzling stupa has the reputation of being one of the world's most beautiful structures. Placed in front of it is a small pagoda built with more

Previous pages: *One of the many important religious ceremonies held at the Potala Palace (by Wang Miao)*

This sparkling gilded statue of the Buddha was brought from Chang'an (1). ■ *This mural portrays the transport of the Buddha statue from Chang'an to Tibet (2).* ■ *The dragon head on top of the Potala Palace reflects the cultural traditions of both the Han and Tang dynasties (3, by Wang Miao).* ■ *The Monument of the Uncle-Nephew Alliance in front of the gate of Jokhang Temple (4)*

than 200,000 pearls, making it a truly rare treasure.

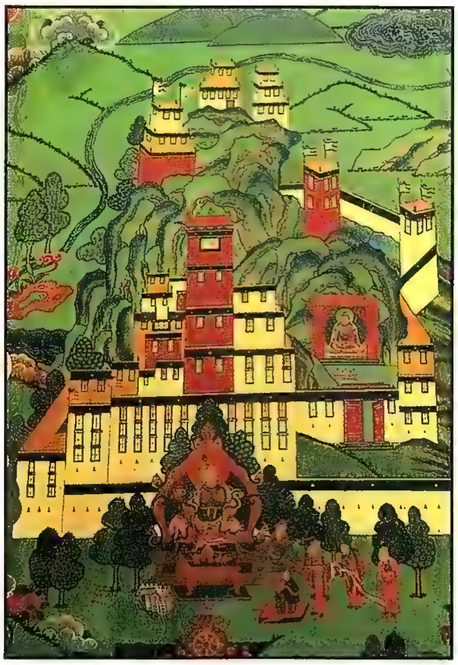
A small gate leads from the Red Palace to a hall called Sishi Puntsok Hall, where a tablet given by Emperor Qianlong (r. 1736-1795) of the Qing Dynasty is hung. The walls are decorated with Tibetan-style murals and there is a piece of silk embroidery portraying the scene when the Fifth Dalai Lama met with the Qing Emperor Shunzhi in Beijing.

To build the Red Palace, 7,000 labourers were needed every day. To get enough stones for the palace, the hill south of the Lhasa River was finally reduced into two halves. Where the earth was removed for building, the place eventually became a pool which now has been turned into a lake for rowing in summer and skating in winter. It is not at all hard to imagine just how much labour and material went into the construction of the palace.

We also visited the White Palace, in which are located the living room of the Dalai Lamas, the bedrooms of the prince regent and the master of Buddhist scriptures, as well as the offices of the Tibetan government. We then ascended the highest point of the palace – Sunlight Hall – which served as the bedroom for the Dalai Lamas. Built to let in adequate sunlight, the luxuriously decorated room is no less sumptuous than the emperors' palaces in China used to be.

The Jokhang – Built to Suppress an Evil Woman

One kilometre west of the Potala Palace is a place which used to be marshlands inhabited by wild goats. Employing her knowledge of *yin* and *yang* and the five elements, Princess Wen Cheng decided that this place was the heart of the evil woman and that a temple must be built here to keep her in place. Songtsan Gambo gave the order that the lake be filled for the construction of a temple, and Tibetans used their white goats to carry earth to fill up the place. To memorialize the contributions the goats made, the temple was first given the name of Earth-carrying Goat Temple. In the mid-17th century, the Mongolian khan took power in Tibet and gave it a Mongolian name which eventually became the Jokhang.



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In front of the temple are three stone monuments, one of which is called the Monument of the Uncle-Nephew Alliance, or the Monument of the Changqing Alliance. Erected during the Changqing period of the Tang Dynasty, it was carved with words in both Han Chinese and Tibetan, and records the close relationship between the Tubo ruler and Emperor Muzong of the Tang Dynasty. On both sides of the surrounding walls we saw Tibetans praying and prostrating. We could clearly hear the sound of their heads touching the ground, indicating their pious devotion.

As soon as we entered the temple that Princess Wen Cheng had personally designed, we were immediately impressed by its architectural style. Unlike the fortress-like Potala, the temple was built on level ground, more like an ancient temple structure in inland China. Structurally, it adopted the Tang-dynasty architectural techniques of using corbel brackets and inverted-V beam frames. Patterns done in lively artistic styles portraying flying apsaras, human figures, animals and birds, flowers and grass, either in bas-relief or painted in colour, covered the doors, pillars, frames and beams.

On the double eaves of the inner corridor were rows of animals and 108 sphinx statues, all carved out of wood. Strangely enough, all of the sphinxes had flat noses. According to legend, Songtsan Gambo used a magic formula to change himself into 108 men who worked on the hall. When Princess Bhrihuti Devi came to visit him, the king was taken by surprise. While hurriedly trying to change back into himself, his axe fell, cutting off all the noses of the human-body and lion-faced people.

In reality, of course, the concept of building these sphinx statues came from ancient Egypt. The idea came to China during the Han and Tang dynasties through the Silk Road from ancient Persia, and then went with Princess Wen Cheng to Tibet. Today the site serves as a living testimony to the cultural exchanges of long ago.

In the centre of the main hall stands a gilded statue of Sakyamuni, the founder of Buddhism. He is portrayed with a gentle smile, narrow, curved eyebrows and wearing luxurious clothes, typical of Tang Dynasty techniques. The statue was actually brought to the Potala by Princess Wen Cheng from Chang'an, the Tang capital, and then moved here later by Princess Jin Cheng. Statues of his four guardians stand on both sides, and were built to commemorate the arrival of the Sakyamuni statue.

In the two side halls are statues of Songtsan Gambo, Princess Wen Cheng and Princess Bhrihuti Devi, as meticulously executed as those in the Potala Palace. The only exception is that on the gilded faces of the statues (including those of Gar Tongtsan, Princess Jin Cheng and Trisong Detsan) there are wrinkles and cracks. This is not due to poor workmanship but rather is the result of worshippers continually adding gold foil as a sign of respect.

Norbu Lingka – an Ideal Place for an Outing

Two kilometres west of the Jokhang is the Norbu Lingka, which means "Treasure Park" in Tibetan. According to historical records, the ground where the park now stands used to be overgrown with bushes. A summer palace was first built here by the Fifth Dalai Lama, but it now serves as a people's park. Covering an area of 36 hectares, it is divided

In this mural one can see a portrayal of Tang-dynasty style music and dance (1). ■ *This mural records the construction of the Potala Palace (2).* ■ *This mural portrays envoys from China's Central Plains presenting gifts to the king of Tibet (3).* ■ *In 710, Princess Jin Cheng followed in the footsteps of Princess Wen Cheng and went to Lhasa along the Tangbo Road, bringing with her large quantities of silk and a large contingent of artisans (4).*

into three sections: the east, centre and west. In the centre is the palace built by successive Dalai Lamas, while the east and west are covered with trees and flowers. The whole park contains more than 50 kinds of trees including pines, cypresses and poplars, and over 60 species of flowers such as peonies and roses. It is a world of tranquility and scenic beauty.

On the first day of the seventh month of the Tibetan calendar, Tibetans hold their Shoton (Yogurt) Festival in the park. It is a great merry-making event and includes the performance of Tibetan opera. Under tall poplar or gentle willow trees, whole families, often with their friends and relatives, erect tents, take out *qingke* (barley) wine, Tibetan yogurt, cheese, milk tea, deep-fried dough and other delicacies and have picnics together. They eat, drink, chat and laugh – and when they feel like it, sing and dance – all day until the sun sets.

In the palace halls in the centre of the park, there are many murals and tangkas reflecting the relationship between the Tibetans and Han Chinese. The most impressive story to us was the one about how Trisong Detsan recognized his mother. According to the book *Tibetan Kings and their Officials* written by the Fifth Dalai Lama, Trisong Detsan was born in 742 and was the son of the Tibetan King Tride Tsugdan and Princess Jin Cheng. At the time, the king's Tibetan concubine Nang Nang also confessed that she was pregnant.

After Princess Jin Cheng had given birth to a child, Nang Nang took it away and told people that she had given birth to the child. The king and his officials did not know what to do, and therefore made no immediate judgment. At the banquet celebrating the young prince's being able to walk, the king gave a gold cup to the prince and said: "Serve the wine to your uncle from your mother's family and we will see who your mother really is." The baby prince gave the wine cup to his relatives from the Central Plains and said: "I am the nephew of the Tang Emperor and have nothing to do with Nang Nang and her family." Princess Jin Cheng was delighted, for a serious wrong had now been righted.

Following in the footsteps of Princess Wen Cheng, Princess Jin Cheng went to Tibet and had a temple built to commemorate Princess Wen Cheng. During Princess Jin Cheng's son's reign, the uncle-nephew relationship that existed between the Tubo king and the Tang emperor laid a solid foundation for the alliance formed at Changqing. After that, the ancient road between Tang and Tubo remained open for a long time, till the end of the two dynasties in the early 900s.

Translated by Huang Youyi

This statue of Princess Wen Cheng is located in the mausoleum of Tibetan kings (1, by Wang Miao). ■ During festivals, Tibetans come to Norbu Lingka to have family picnics (2, by Wang Miao). ■ The ancient forest behind Potala Hill (3) ■ The mausoleum of Tibetan kings is located at Qongyai to the south of Lhasa and contains the tombs of Songtsan Gambo and Princess Wen Cheng (4, by Zhazi Cedain).

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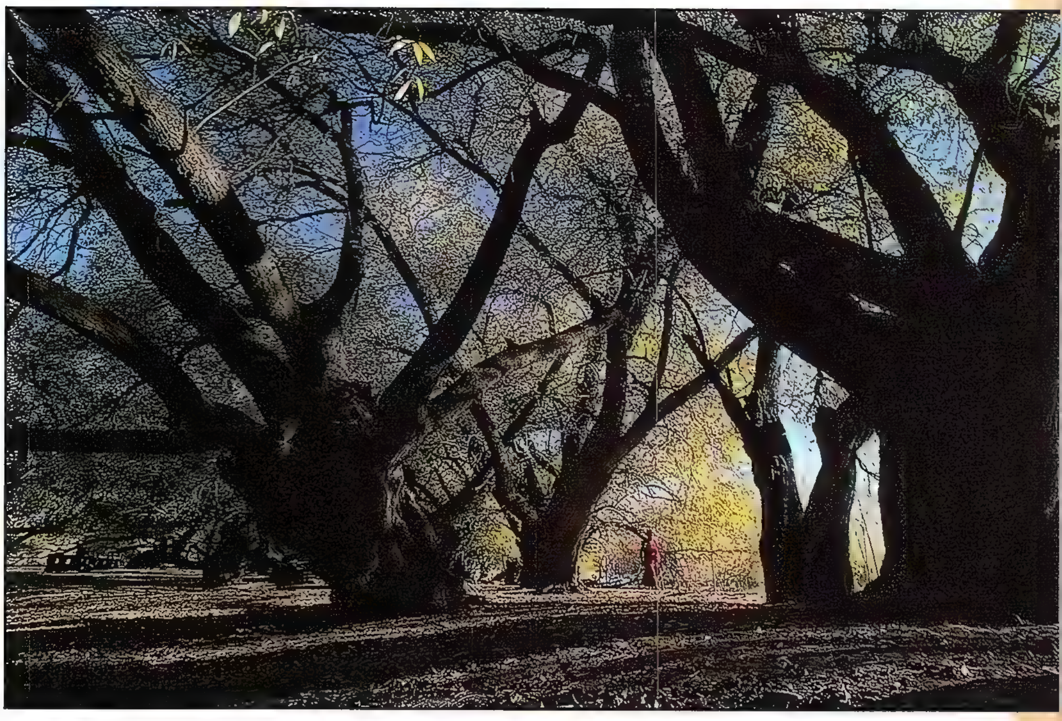

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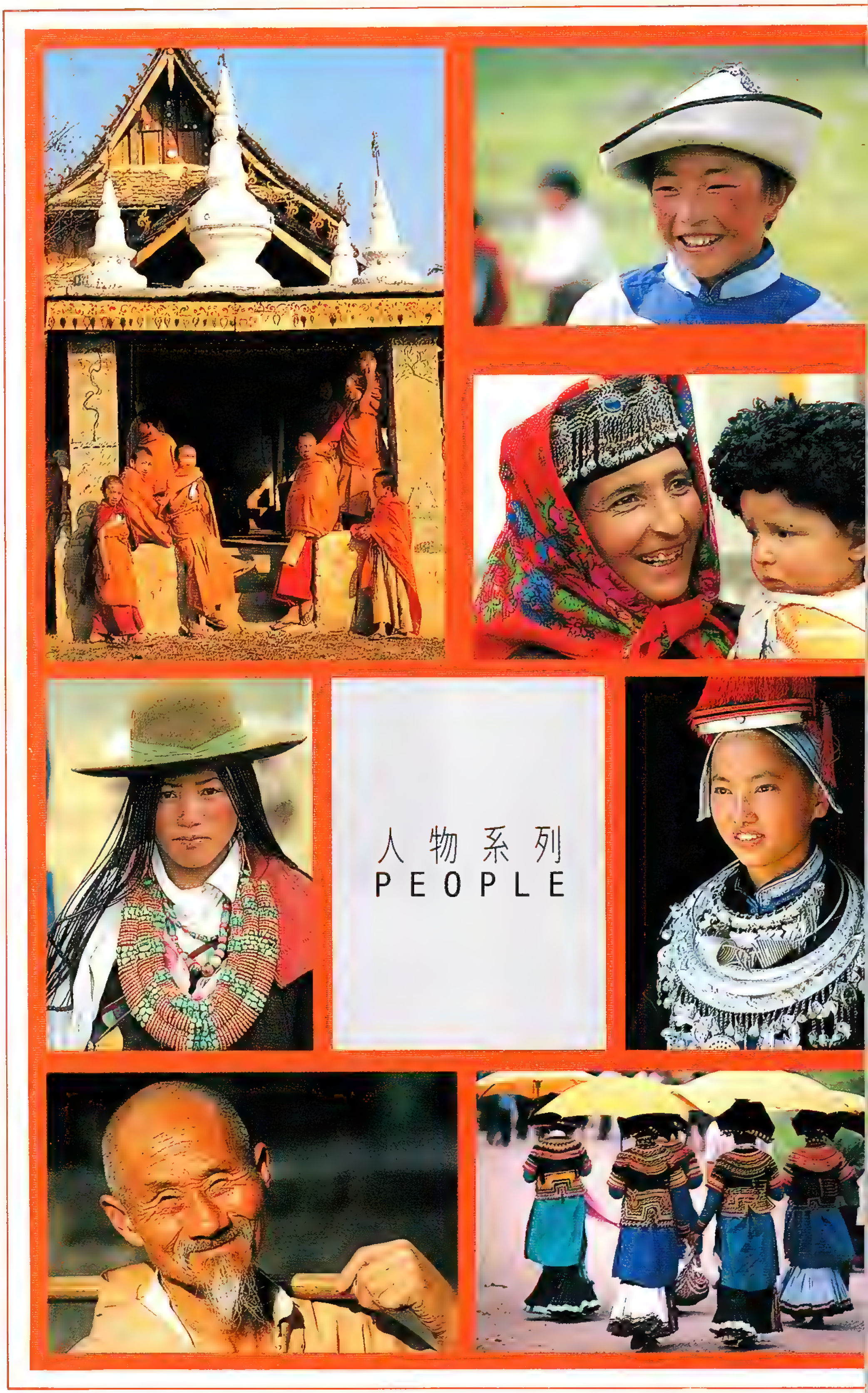

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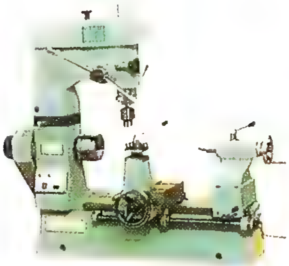

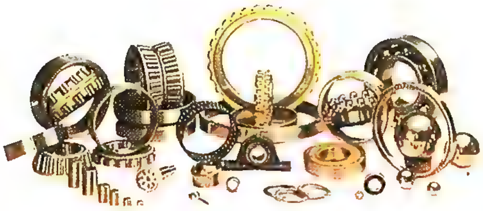

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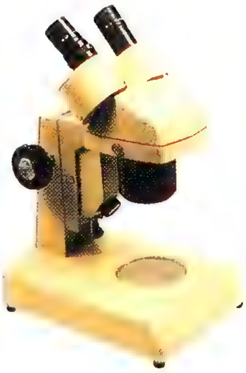

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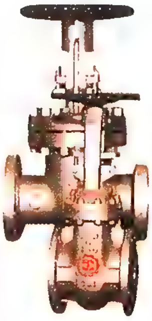

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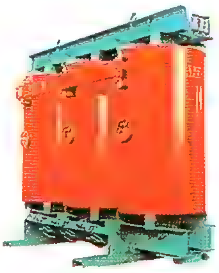

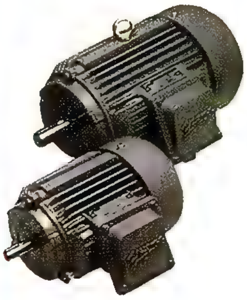

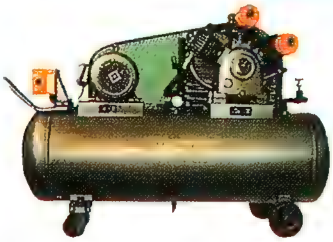

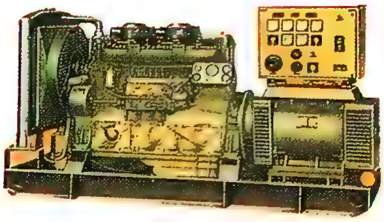

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Hongyun Hotel
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Tel: 55981

204 Donggang Road West, Lanzhou, Gansu 730000
Tel: 416321

Ningwozhuang Guesthouse
寧臥莊賓館
238 Tianshui Road, Lanzhou, Gansu 730000
Tel: 416221 Telex: 72146 GUEST CN
Fax: 417639
GM: Hou Shenghua
130 rooms
Located 1 km from airport, 1 km from railway station
Facilities: Chinese and Western restaurants, meeting and conference rooms, business centre, shopping arcade, beauty salon, billiard room, dance hall, tennis courts, function rooms

Victory Hotel
勝利賓館
127 Zhongshan Road, Lanzhou, Gansu 730030
Tel: 465221

Zhongchuan Airport Hotel
中川機場飯店
Zhongchuan Airport, Lanzhou, Gansu 730087
Tel: 23415

Dunhuang, Gansu

Dunhuang Hotel
敦煌賓館
1 Dongda Street, Dunhuang, Gansu 736200
Tel: 22415, 22538 Telex: 72078 DHBGS CN
Fax: (09437) 22309
GM: Zhang Kejun
Opened October 1 1980
155 rooms and suites Rates: Standard US$45, suite US$66
Located 13 km from airport, 128 km from railway station
Taxi fare to/from airport Rmb￥39; railway station Rmb￥384
Facilities: Restaurants, business centre, nightclub, karaoke, bar, ballroom

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Opened 18 August 1987
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1 Xinhua Road North, Jiayuguan, Gansu 735100
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GM: Wang Li
Opened 1983
36 rooms and suites Rates: US$25
Located 13 km from airport, 5 km from railway station
Taxi fare to/from airport Rmb￥30; railway station Rmb￥10
Facilities: Chinese and Western restaurants, conference and banquet halls, bar, coffee shop, shopping arcade, karaoke, gym, massage, indoor swimming pool, beauty salon

Jiuquan, Gansu

Jiuquan Hotel
酒泉賓館
33 Jiefang Road, Jiuquan, Gansu 735000
Tel: 4234, 4277 Telex: 73163 GSJQH CN
GM: Yin Zipei
Opened May 15 1989
154 rooms and suites Rates: Double US$28
Located 22 km from airport, 9 km from railway station

Xiahe, Gansu

Labrang Guesthouse
拉卜楞賓館
County seat of Xiahe County, Xiahe, Gansu 747100

Xi'an, Shaanxi

Bell Tower Hotel
鐘樓飯店
Southwest of Bell Tower, Xi'an, Shaanxi 710001
Tel: 7279200 Telex: 70124 XABTH CN/70195 BTH CN
Fax: (029)/18970/718767
305 rooms and 16 suites
Located 5 km from airport and railway station
Facilities: Chinese and Western restaurants, conference room, business centre, bar, coffee shop, disco, gym, shopping centre, facilities for handicapped persons, babysitting service

China Merchants Hotel
華商酒店
131 Heping Road, Xi'an, Shaanxi 710001
Tel: 7218988 Telex: 700269 CMH CN
Fax: (0292) 7218588
GM: Victor Yang
Opened 1 March 1990
150 rooms and suites Rates: US$40
Located in city centre, 49 km from airport, 1 km from railway station
Taxi fare to/from airport Rmb￥120; railway station Rmb￥7
Facilities: Chinese and Western restaurants, coffee shop, music hall, disco, karaoke, massage

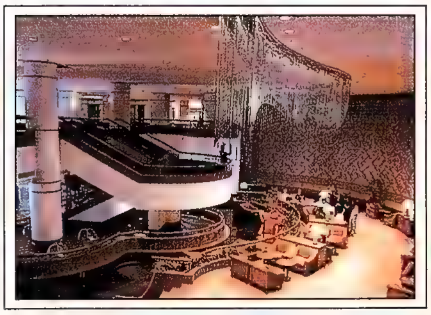
City Hotel
城市酒店
5 Nanda Street, Xi'an, Shaanxi 710002
Tel: 7219988
Fax: 7216688
GM: Chen Kangyi
Opened 22 June 1988
143 rooms and suites Rates: US$52 (+10%)
Located 45 km from airport, 15 km from railway station
Taxi fare to/from airport Rmb￥230; railway station Rmb￥60
Facilities: Chinese and Western restaurants, bar, business centre, coffee shop, karaoke-dance hall, massage, beauty salon, shopping arcade

Concord Hotel
協和大酒店
28 Fenghao Road East, Xi'an, Shaanxi 710077
Tel: 742811 Telex: 70024 CHNHL CN
Fax: 742814
161 rooms and 6 suites
Located 10 km from city centre, 2 km from airport, 15 km from railway station

Facilities: Chinese and Western restaurants, conference room, business centre, bar, ballroom, disco, karaoke, beauty salon, clinic, billiard room, tennnis courts, massage, shopping centre, babysitting service, facilities for handicapped persons

Dynasty Hotel
秦都酒店
55 Huancheng Road North, Xi'an, Shaanxi 710082
Tel: (86-29) 7212718 Telex: 700233 DHX CN
Fax: (86-29) 72112728
GM: Steven Tan
Opened 12 July 1990
200 rooms and 34 suites Rates: US$75
Located 45 km from airport, 8 km from railway station
Facilities: Chinese, Western and Korean restaurants, banquet hall, busines centre, bar, gym, massage, sauna, beauty salon, karaoke, disco, shopping arcade

Hyatt Regency Xi'an
凱悦（阿房宮）飯店



158 Dongba Street, Xi'an, Shaanxi 710001
Tel: 7231234 Telex: 70048 AFPH CN
Fax: 7216799
GM: Paul Hugentobler
Opened July 1990
394 rooms Rates: Single/double US$110-130, suite US$200-1,000
Located 43 km from airport, 2 km from railway station
Taxi fare to/from airport Rmb ¥ 200; railway station Rmb ¥ 10
Facilities: Restaurants, bar, gym, whirlpool, sauna, steambath, massage, beauty salon, shopping arcade

Jianguo Hotel
建國飯店
20 Jinhua Road South, Xi'an, Shaanxi 710000
Tel: (86) 29-338888
Fax: (86) 29-335145
Opened 12 March 1989
710 rooms and suites
Located near the Xingqing Park, Xi'an Zoo and the Banpo Museum, 12km/25 min from airport, 7 km/10 min from railway station
Facilities: Chinese and Western restaurants, business centre, bar, coffee shop, ballroom, beauty salon, in door swimming pool, bicycle rental and the biggest tourism shopping mall in Xi'an

J Z Regency Hotel Xi'an
君爵國際酒店
15 Changle Middle Road, Xi'an, Shaanxi 710032
Tel/Fax: (29) 332-009
Opened 1992
293 rooms and 104 suites
Located 40 km from airport
Facilities: Chinese, Japanese, Korean barbecue restaurants, banquet rooms, business centre, commercial centre, shopping arcade, tennis courts, outdoor golf course, beauty salon, karaoke, nightclub

New World Hotel
古都大酒店
48 Lianhu Road, Xi'an, Shaanxi 710002
Tel: 7216868 Telex: 70156 XDHTL CN
Fax: 7219754
501 rooms
Located 3 km from the city centre, 4 km from airport, 3 km from railway station
Facilities: Chinese and Western restaurants, conference room, business centre, bar, disco, theatre, shopping arcade, karaoke, gym, tennis courts, swimming pool, billiard room, sauna, massage, babysitting service, facilities for handicapped persons

Shangri-La Garden Flower
香格里拉金花飯店

8 Changle Road West, Xi'an, Shaanxi 710032
Tel: (86-29) 3232981
Telex: 70155 SLX CN
Fax: (86-29) 3235477, 3235185
GM: Brian Leong
Opened 1 April 1985
435 rooms and 47 suites Rates: US$90-110
Located 45 km from airport, 3 km from railway station
Taxi fare to/from airport Rmb ¥ 180; railway station Rmb ¥ 20
Facilities: Restaurants, business centre, bar, coffee shop, disco, karaoke, indoor swimming pool, gym, sauna, massage, beauty salon, clinic, babysitting service

Tang Cheng Hotel
唐城賓館
3 Lingyuan Road South, Xi'an, Shaanxi 710061
Tel: 7211164 Telex: 70013 TCH CN
Fax: (029) 7211041
Opened 1987
395 rooms and 11 suites Rate: Standard US$46, single US$64, suite US$92-382
Located 7 km from city centre and airport, 10 km from railway station
Facilities: Chinese and Western restaurants, conference room, business centre, exhibition hall, bar, coffee shop, shopping arcade, ballroom, disco, karaoke, clinic, beauty salon, billiard room, massage, babysitting service.

Wan Nian Hotel
萬年飯店
11 Changle Road Central, Xi'an Shaanxi 710032
Tel: 3231932, 3232523 Telex: 70033 XWNG CN
Fax: 3235460
162 rooms and 4 suites
Located 6 km from the city centre, 12 km from airport, 5 km from railway station
Facilities: Chinese restaurant, bar, coffee shop, disco, shopping arcade, babysitting service

Xi'an Empress Hotel
西安皇后大酒店
45 Xingqing Road, Xi'an, Shaanxi 710084
Tel: 3232999
Fax: 3236988
Opened 1993
259 rooms and suites
Facilities: Chinese, Western, Japanese and Korean restaurants, business centre, shopping arcade, coffee shop, disco, billiard room, bowling

Xi'an Garden Hotel – Tang Hua
唐華賓館

4 Yanyin Road, Xi'an, Shaanxi 710000
Tel: (029) 5261111 Telex: 70027 GAHTL CN
Fax: (029) 561988
GM: Kenichi Takashi
301 rooms and suites Rates: US$110-250
Located 48 km from airport, 6 km from railway station
Taxi fare to/from airport US$20/person; railway station US$3/person
Facilities: Chinese, Western and Japanese restaurants, banquet rooms, conference rooms, bar, shopping arcade, disco, sauna, beauty salon, clinic

Xi'an Lee Gardens Hotel
西安利園酒店
8 Laodong Road South, Xi'an, Shaanxi 710000
Tel: (29) 7243388
Opened August 1992
296 rooms and 10 suites
Located in the southwestern part of the city
Facilities: Chinese and Western restaurants, business centre, bar, disco, coffee shop

Tourist Attractions Along the Tangbo Road

ARTICLE BY SHI BAO XIU

Veteran singers of the Tu minority at a Flower Festival (by Zheng Yunfeng)

During the height of the Tang Dynasty over 1,000 years ago, the Tangbo Road too was at its most prosperous and flourishing. Centuries passed and today, due to the construction of the Qinghai-Tibet Highway, the ancient road has entirely lost its former function. However, it has recently attracted many tourists' interest due to its many other charms, such as its beautiful mountains, ancient temples, hot springs, snow-capped ridges, clear lakes and the fact that it is the highest highway in elevation in the world. In addition, along the route one can see the unique customs and simple life styles of the Tu and Tibetan peoples who live far from hectic cities and towns, thus both nature-lovers and adventure travellers can find much of interest.

Ancient Sites in the Hehuang Area

From the west bank of the Huangshui River to the city of Xining in Qinghai Province was the Hehuang section of the ancient Tangbo Road. Historical sites in this section include ancient temples and monasteries.

Beishan Temple Located in Xining's urban area, Beishan Temple was built during the Han and Wei dynasties, and is even older than the city itself. Standing on a broken stratum of red sandstone halfway up a mountain, the temple consists of towers, terraces, pagodas and halls, as well as bridges and hanging corridors in perilous locations. On a plank bridge near the temple one can have a panoramic view of the entire city of Xining.

Dongguan Mosque Also in the urban area, Dongguan Mosque is an early Ming-dynasty structure with a history of 500 years. The centre of the mosque has a hall large enough for 3,000 people to pray at one time. All the mosque's beams and columns are carved, gilded or painted, making it beautiful both inside and out.

Ta'er Temple Ta'er (Kumbum) Temple is the largest temple of the Yellow Hat Sect of Tibetan Buddhism in Qinghai Province, and is located in Huangzhong County in the suburbs of Xining. It is a sacred place of worship for Tibetan, Tu and Mongolian Buddhists from Qinghai and Gansu provinces.

Located to the north of Xining is the Huzhu Tu Autonomous County, which is inhabited by the Tu minority – a group who excel at singing and embroidery. "Flowers" are what they call the songs they sing all year round. Each year, they hold singing competitions on the second day of the second lunar month, the eighth day of the fourth month, the sixth day of the sixth month and the 15th day of the seventh month. In addition, a religious assembly at Youning Temple on the 14th day of the first lunar month is a festive and boisterous occasion.

If one is invited to be a guest at a Tu house one should be alert to some taboos. The Tu abstain from celebrating the Mid-Autumn Festival and from eating horse, mule or donkey meat. They also resent guests counting their number of sheep or cattle, and sitting on their pillows or quilts. The Tu people are also known for their beautiful and intricate embroidery work, which can be seen in abundance in this area.

A Tour of Mountains and Lakes

Starting from Xining, this itinerary goes west past Yaoshui Gorge, where visitors can visit Shibao City, a military fort from the Tang and Sui dynasties, and the noted Riyue (Sun and Moon) Mountain 10 kilometres away. From atop the mountain one has a view of a vast grassland with herds of sheep and cattle in the west, and terraced fields with rippling wheat in the east. Most tourists come here for the purpose of following the trail of Princess Wen Cheng. One can find murals depicting her journey to Tibet in the Sun and Moon Pavilions at the foot of the mountain.

A little way from the mountain is the winding Daotang (Backward Flowing) River on the Qagan Grassland. Legend has it that the river was formed by the tears shed by the sad Princess Wen Cheng as she was leaving her homeland. Riding 30 kilometres along the Daotang River to the west, one arrives at Qinghai Lake – the largest of its kind in China. Due to its high altitude of more than 3,000 metres above sea level, the lake area is a favourite summer resort with travellers.

The fish living in this lake are delicious, and the mid-lake island and Bird Island are both beautiful sites to visit.

A Tour of Two River's Sources

To the southwest of the Tangbo Road is a highway that goes straight to the Qieji Grassland – once called the Dafeichuan Battlefield – and then passes Daheba and goes to Wenquan. Going east from Kuhai, one reaches the area between Gyaring and Ngoring lakes that is believed to be the source of the Yellow River. This was where Songtsan Gambo (617-650) and Princess Wen Cheng first met and were married. The scenery here is beautiful and it is the habitat of various kinds of birds.

Returning to Madoi, one can travel south along the highway, cross the gentle slopes of the Bayan Har Pass and reach the Tongtian River – the source of the Yangtse. The mountains here are high, the gorges long and the current swift. On both banks of the river are dense forests, luxuriant flowers and wild birds and animals. It is said that this was the very river that the Tang-dynasty monk Xuan Zang and his disciples crossed, riding on the back of a thousand-year-old tortoise, as described in the Chinese classic *Journey to the West*. To the south of the bridge, which was built later, is a huge rock said to be the spot on which Xuan Zang sunned his Buddhist sutras which he had got wet in the river. There are marks on the rock that are believed to have been left during the sunning of the sutras.

After the Tongtian River, one arrives at Jiegu Town in the Yushu Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture. Baina Gully, ten kilometres from the town, was where Princess Wen Cheng and the Tibetan king spent their honeymoon. A temple dedicated to the Tang-dynasty princess was later built here and is still frequented by worshippers.

The Song and Dance Assembly and the Flower Offering Festival held respectively on Yushu's Jiegu Grassland and Madoi Grassland take place in July and August. These grand folk carnivals usually last several nights and days.

Offerings of prayer flags, mani stones and a yak skull makes up a typical worshipping site (by Yang Yankang).

The Northern Tibet Plateau Tour

If one travels south along the Qinghai-Xikang Highway from Yushu – though this deviates greatly from the ancient Tubo Road – tourists can avoid the hardships of crossing the 700-kilometre wild plains and snow-covered ridges on foot. The road converges with the Ya'an-Lhasa Highway at Maniganggo, and from that point the road leads straight to the Northern Tibet Plateau on the southern slope of the Tanggula Mountains.

The Northern Tibet Plateau is the hinterland of the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau. It sits at an average altitude of over 4,500 metres and the annual average temperatures are between -5 and -6℃. No prosperous towns or villages can be found here – only vast grasslands with grazing yak, Tibetan sheep and scattered yurts. It is a no-man's land with numerous lakes, wild flowers and animals. In addition, this snow-covered region is blessed with natural hot springs. Hot springs have been dug at Yangbajain, which spurt out steam as high as a hundred metres. Hot-water rivers and lakes are also a common sight in this area.

Translated by K. Y. Ku

Average Climatic Conditions in Gansu, Shaanxi and Tibet

			Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	April	May	June	July	Aug.	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.
Gansu	Lanzhou	Temperature (℃)	-6.9	-2.3	5.2	11.8	16.6	20.3	22.2	21.0	15.8	9.4	1.7	-5.5
		Rainfall (mm)	1.4	2.4	8.3	17.4	36.2	32.5	63.8	85.3	49.1	24.7	5.4	1.3
	Dunhuang	Temperature (℃)	-9.3	-4.1	4.5	12.4	18.3	22.7	24.7	23.5	17.0	8.7	0.2	-7.0
		Rainfall (mm)	0.8	1.6	1.2	2.9	1.6	6.7	12.1	5.3	1.8	1.0	1.1	0.7
	Jiuquan	Temperature (℃)	-10.2	-6.9	1.9	9.0	6.0	19.8	21.4	20.6	14.3	7.1	-1.6	-8.5
		Rainfall (mm)	2.0	2.6	4.4	4.9	13.3	7.4	16.7	13.9	11.5	2.1	2.0	1.3
Shaanxi	Xi'an	Temperature (℃)	-1.0	2.1	8.1	14.1	19.1	25.2	26.6	25.5	19.4	13.7	6.6	0.7
		Rainfall (mm)	7.6	10.6	24.6	52.0	63.2	52.2	99.4	71.7	98.3	62.4	31.5	6.7
Tibet	Lhasa	Temperature (℃)	-2.3	1.1	4.5	8.3	12.3	15.4	15.4	14.3	12.7	8.2	2.3	-1.7
		Rainfall (mm)	0.2	0.5	1.5	5.4	25.4	77.1	129.5	138.7	56.3	7.9	1.6	0.5

Flights to and from Xi'an

Route	Day of Week	Dep.	Arr.	Flight No.
Beijing – Xi'an	3	13:20	15:05	SF127
	5	15:40	17:20	WH2110
	7	14:20	16:05	SF129
	2 5	07:55	09:45	X2103
	2 6	11:15	12:55	SF123
	2 6	15:00	16:45	WH2104
	3 6	14:45	16:30	WH2604
	4 7	15:45	17:30	WH2122
	1 2 4 7	15:35	17:15	CA1235
	1 3 4 6 7	10:55	12:40	WH2124
	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	07:35	09:10	CA1215
	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	14:05	15:45	CA1201
	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	16:20	18:05	WH2102
	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	17:00	18:45	WH2108
	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	17:25	19:00	CA1245
	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	20:45	22:30	WH2106
Xi'an – Beijing	5	07:10	08:40	WH2109
	2 5	18:55	20:45	X2104
	2 6	13:35	15:05	SF124
	2 6	07:00	08:30	WH2103
	3 6	07:20	08:50	WH2603
	4 7	07:00	08:40	WH2121
	1 3 4 6 7	08:30	10:05	WH2123
	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	16:35	18:10	CA1202
	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	06:50	08:20	WH2101
	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	14:40	16:05	WH2107
	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	19:30	21:05	CA1246
	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	18:25	19:55	WH2105
Guangzhou – Xi'an	1	16:40	19:09	WH2368
	2	15:40	17:50	WH2324
	3	15:55	18:25	WH2366
	3	19:25	21:50	WH2330
	3 6	17:30	20:00	WH2322
	1 3 5 7	14:40	17:00	CZ3201
	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	10:25	12:45	WH2306
	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	18:40	21:05	WH2304
Xi'an – Guangzhou	1	07:25	09:40	WH2367
	2	06:55	09:10	WH2323
	3	12:20	15:05	WH2365
	3	08:35	10:45	WH2329
	3 6	07:05	09:20	WH2321
	1 3 5 7	17:50	20:20	CZ3202
	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	07:15	09:35	WH2305
	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	07:55	10:25	WH2303
Hong Kong – Xi'an	2 4 6 7	17:35	19:50	CZ322
Xi'an – Hong Kong	2 4 6 7	13:50	16:25	CZ321
Nagoya – Xi'an	2 5	15:30	18:30	MU294
	4 7	15:30	20:00	MU292
Xi'an – Nagoya	2 5	08:05	14:15	MU293
Shanghai – Xi'an	3	10:05	12:15	WH2522
	1 5	15:15	17:25	WH2510
	2 6	18:40	21:00	WH2504
	4 7	17:55	20:00	MU292
	2 4 6	10:05	12:10	SF203
	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	18:25	20:35	WH2502
Xi'an – Shanghai	3	07:25	09:15	WH2521
	3	16:00	17:40	SF206
	7	16:55	18:50	SF208
	1 5	07:05	09:00	WH2509
	2 5	08:05	10:05	WH293
	2 6	08:45	10:40	WH2503
	2 4 6	13:05	14:55	SF204
	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	15:02	17:10	WH2501
	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	09:50	11:30	CA1567
Shenzhen – Xi'an	4	18:55	21:25	WH2354
	3 7	16:10	18:35	CZ3251
	1 2 5 7	11:40	14:00	WH2326
Xi'an – Shenzher	4	08:15	10:35	WH2353
	3 7	19:15	21:40	CZ3252
	1 2 5 7	08:15	10:35	WH2325

(Valid October 1994)

Flights to and from Xining

Route	Day of Week	Dep.	Arr.	Flight No.
Beijing – Xining	2	14:30	17:15	WH2142
	5	09:25	11:45	WH2126
Xining – Beijing	2	11:30	13:50	WH2141
	5	12:30	14:35	WH2125
Guangzhou – Xining	3	11:40	14:50	WH2350
	6	11:45	18:00	XO9308
Xining – Guangzhou	3	15:40	18:35	WH2349
	6	11:25	14:05	XO9307
Urumqi – Xining	6	08:35	10:35	XO9307
Xining – Urumqi	6	18:50	21:10	XO9308
Xi'an – Xining	2	09:10	10:40	WH2219
Xining – Xi'an	2	18:05	19:30	WH2220

(Valid October 1994)

Flights to and from Lhasa

Route	Day of Week	Dep.	Arr.	Flight No.
Lhasa – Beijing	7	09:50	14:15	SZ4111
Chengdu – Lhasa	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	07:00	09:00	SZ4403
	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	06:50	08:50	SZ4401
Lhasa – Chengdu	7	09:50	11:30	SZ4111
	2 6	14:20	16:00	SZ4444
	1 3 4 5	09:50	11:40	SZ4404
	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	09:40	11:20	SZ4402
Chongqing – Lhasa	2 5	07:00	09:30	SZ4419
Lhasa – Chongqing	2 5	10:20	12:30	SZ4420
Kathmandu – Lhasa	2 6	10:15	13:30	SZ408
Lhasa – Kathmandu	2 6	10:20	09:15	SZ407

(Valid October 1994)

Train Schedules
Xining - Golmud

507 Ordinary	Train No Station	508 Ordinary
07:50	Xining	19:24
08:08	Xining West	19:08
09:41	Huangyuan	17:33
11:06	Haiyan	15:59
14:26	Gangca	12:38
16:56	Tianjun	10:06
20:01	Ulan	06:54
23:41	Delingha	03:50
04:18	Xitieshan	23:22
05:51	Qarhan	21:42
7:16	Golmud	20:15

NEXT ISSUE

This time of year — the end of summer — is for many the last chance to take an extended annual holiday. Not restricted by climate as at other times of the year, one can go virtually anywhere in China, and in our next issue we will do just that. We will take you as far afield as the vast Taklimakan Desert in Xinjiang, as far south as Shenzhen and Panyu in Guangdong, and to many other interesting sites in between.

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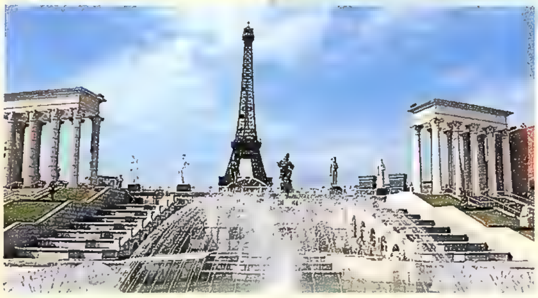

Across the Taklimakan Desert

The Spectacular Scenery of Jinggang Mountain

A Serene Visit to [illegible] Lake

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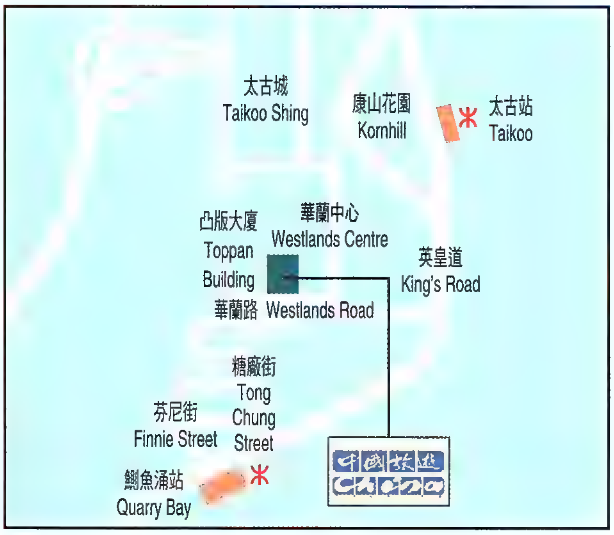

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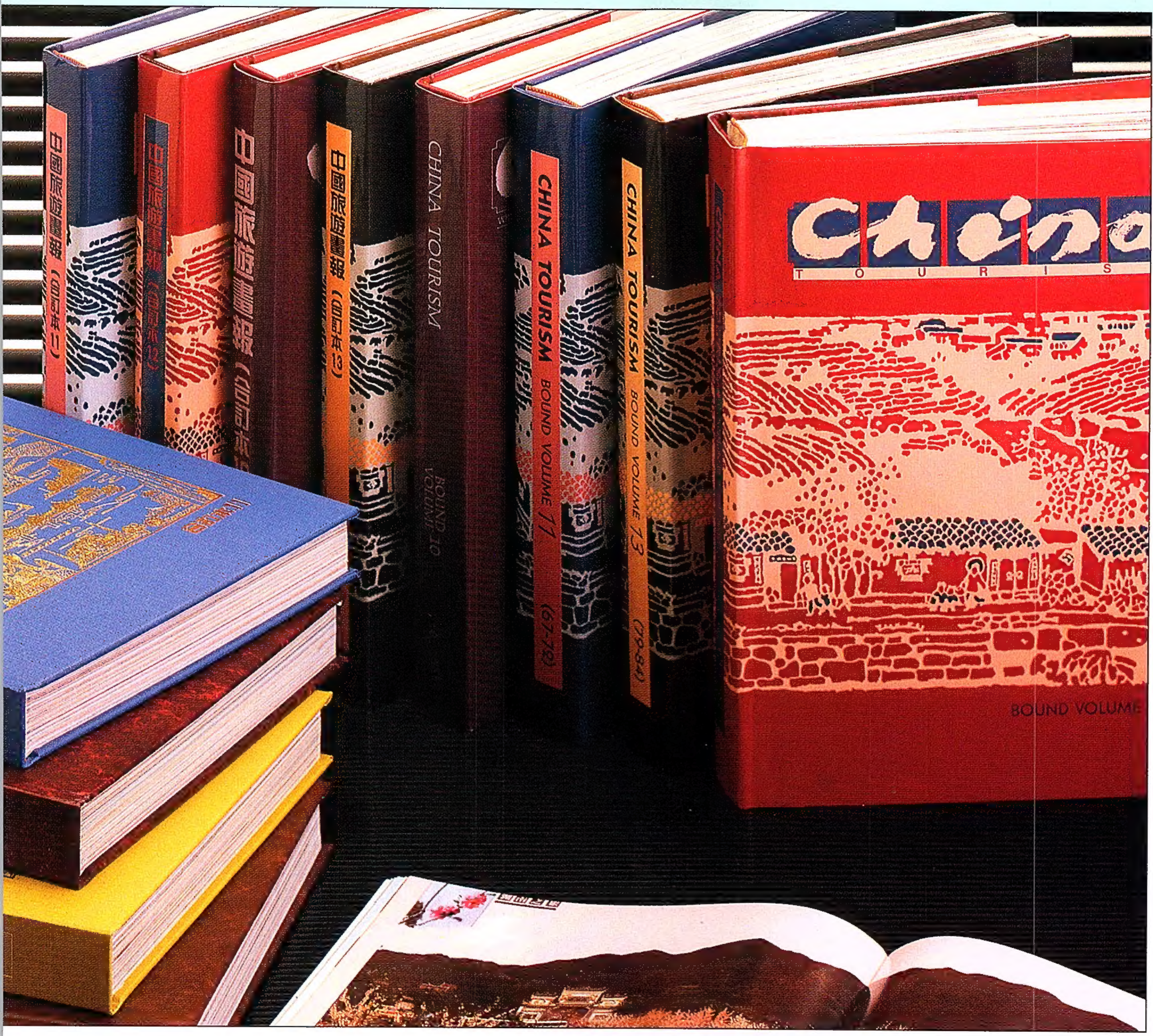

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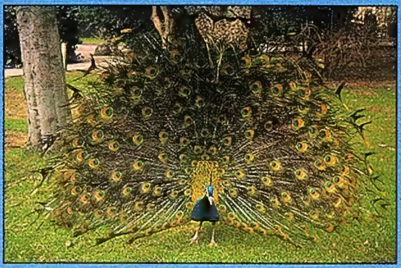

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